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"THIS IS CERTAINLY THE MOST STRENUOUS PICNIC I EVER ATTENDED!"—*Page 371.*

WHEN MAX CAME

BY

EDNA A. BROWN

Author of "Four Gordons," and "Uncle David's Boys"

ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN GOSS

BOSTON

LOTHROP, LEE & SHEPARD CO.

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When Max Came

Norwood Press
BERWICK & SMITH CO.
NORWOOD, MASS.
U. S. A.

Though long ago the word was penned,
"Of making books there is no end,"
This book was made to please my friend.

DEDICATED

TO

J. E. T.

88199

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WHEN MAX CAME

CHAPTER I

HOW THE STORY BEGAN

"MY dear boy, I am just as sorry about it as you are, but what can we do? I cannot take you to India with me when three physicians say you ought not to go. You forget how ill you have been."

The tall lad addressed made no immediate response, but continued to gaze into Russell Square with a sober, rather unhappy expression on a face that looked as if it were more accustomed to wear a smile.

"And yet you propose to ship me off to the United States!" he said at length.

"The Atlantic in June is a different proposition from the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean."

"I'll bet I could find three doctors to contradict the opinion of those old freaks!" continued the lad flippantly and with the assurance of an only son. "I'm perfectly well again, Dad, and I don't want to spend the summer with an aunt and cousins I've never seen.

Of course we've had letters, but it isn't the same. I know I'll not like them and there's no earthly reason why they should like me!"

"Don't be ridiculous, Max," said his father in a puzzled manner. He sat by the table, balancing a fountain pen across one finger, apparently oblivious of the fact that the seesaw movement was disagreeing with it.

Max was turning from the window when an incident in the square caught his attention. A sleepy old London cab horse drowsed in the sunshine while cabby also slumbered peacefully upon the box. Along came a street urchin, possessed, by some kindly fortune, of a pasteboard megaphone. He spoke through it into the horse's ear and the result exceeded his expectations. Max, looking down from the window, laughed outright as the suddenly electrified steed bolted wildly at a right angle across the street, while the driver, minus his hat, clutched frantically at the reins and poured a flood of invective upon the grinning imp who had caused the commotion.

Still smiling, Max turned to face his father. An expression of affectionate amusement came into his eyes as he noticed the damage done by the misused pen.

"You'll be sorry!" he began whimsically. "You'll mislay your notebooks, and lose your tickets, and miss your trains, and forget where you're going, and spill ink on all the hotel table-covers! Oh, you'll be sorry

you made me go off by myself and have a beastly time all summer!"

"Max, I'm really ashamed that you've never seen Aunt Helen and Uncle George, nor ever been to the States. I've let you grow up in Italy and be taught by Englishmen until you seem in danger of forgetting that you are an American. It is high time you paid a visit there."

"You'll be sorry when you've done it!" replied the boy in the same whimsical tone.

"I cannot take you with me; that is out of the question. I shall be glad if you are willing to accept this invitation from Aunt Helen. I know you would have a very jolly summer."

"Hear him say I'll have a good time!" Max remarked to a sparrow chirping in the tree outside.

"I haven't lived with you all your life not to know exactly what your state of mind will be after three months in Maine. You will be very reluctant to leave the place and all the new friends you have made. I am no prophet; I'm merely observant, and it happens every summer!"

Max laughed, and his father went on affectionately.

"I am disappointed too, for I shall miss you more than you will me. But, really, I sometimes doubt if I have done right in allowing you to knock about with me as you have in the ten years since your mother died."

"Don't you worry over that, Dad!" said his son cheerfully. Wandering around Europe with his boyish father, who was the best of chums and companions, seemed to Max the most delightful occupation in the world.

"Of course you need not go to Maine unless you wish; you may stop in Scotland with the Lisles if you prefer, but since India is impossible, isn't it a chance to give great pleasure to some people who very much want your company?"

"Will you listen to the conceit of him?" Max inquired of the sparrow. "Just because he likes to have me around, he thinks every one must! We'll see what happens when America discovers me!"

"Oh, then you've decided to go?" laughed his father.

"Decided some time ago, Dad, but I thought I'd listen politely to your eloquent arguments. I'll go — on one condition, but you must give me a written agreement about it."

"I'll agree to anything within reason."

"Then please let me have that pen — poor thing, how seasick you have made it!"

Max scribbled rapidly for a moment, a mischievous smile curling his lips, and presented the paper for a signature.

"I never sign anything without first reading it,"

said his father, adjusting his eyeglasses to peruse the offered document.

"HOTEL RUSSELL, LONDON, W. C., June 14, 19—

"I, Rodney C. Hamilton, of Rome, Italy, possessor of a half-alphabet of honorary degrees, being of moderately sound mind, do solemnly promise Maxfield, my only and angel child, that, in consideration of his behaving like a plaster saint and stopping meekly for three months in the backwoods of Maine, he shall next year spend the entire summer with me, whether my destination be Hammerfest or Patagonia.

"Signed, sealed, and delivered in the presence of Max."

Professor Hamilton read this remarkable agreement twice. "Hm! 'angel child!'" he commented thoughtfully. "I suppose there is no room for a difference of opinion on that point?"

"None whatever!" was the prompt reply. "The insinuation grieves me, Dad!"

"'Plaster saint'— curious expression, that! I am in doubt as to exactly what line of conduct it involves. Well — if you understand it, I suppose it doesn't matter."

With a twinkle in his eyes, he took the pen and ceremoniously signed his name.

Three weeks after this conversation, a boat was rocking gently off a wooded shore on one of the lonely lakes of Maine. The sole occupant was a girl of fifteen who was resting on her oars, evidently waiting

for some one to come down from the road above, for an occasional rustling of twigs and crackling of branches showed that a short cut was being attempted.

The sun was both bright and hot, and Hope kept pushing back her hair and shielding her eyes as she cast impatient glances at the half-obliterated path leading into the woods. She scorned a hat; what was the use of a country summer if one did not go back brown and sunburned to the city in the fall? Presently the firs parted, and a tall athletic boy emerged, carrying a fishing rod and a string of pickerel.

"I thought you were never coming!" Hope began eagerly.

"Aren't they beauties?" inquired her brother, holding the fish for her inspection, their striped sides glistening in the sun. "I wonder why they are called pickerel. They are shaped just like lead-pencils."

"George Ralston, you are the most provoking person on earth!" Hope exclaimed. "Here I have important news to tell you and you talk about fish!"

Her good-natured brother only laughed at this accusation. As a little boy, he had been called Junior to distinguish him from his father, and later this was shortened to June. The name seemed appropriate, for he had grown up with a happy, even disposition.

"Is Max really coming?" he asked as he stepped into the boat and began to row leisurely. "Mother's

invited him so many times without any result that I began to think Uncle Rod never meant to let him visit us."

"Yes, he's coming. Mother's perfectly delighted. I left her actually crying over the letter,— she was so glad about it. Do you suppose we'll like him?"

"Uncle Rod is mighty nice; I guess we can stand Max," replied June, feathering his oars with careful precision and thinking of the pleasant recollection left by his uncle's only visit.

"I almost wish he wasn't coming," Hope observed, as she watched the trailing ends of the oars. "Imagine having a cousin we've never seen and who has been brought up in Europe at that, coming to stay all summer! And Uncle Rod has ever so much money and he's a terribly important person with all those big scientific people; Max has been everywhere and had everything — what will he think of the way we are living here in Maine? He may not realize that we don't live so all the year. I wouldn't care so much if he came when we were at home. There we have servants and the house is so pretty."

"If Max has any sense, he'll have a good time. I like it; why shouldn't he?"

"We usually have such fun together, and I'm afraid Max will be horrid and stuck up and won't like the things we do, and it will spoil everything!" said Hope rather gloomily.

"On the contrary, he may know tremendously interesting things to show us how to do."

"That's not likely!" replied his sister emphatically. "Do you suppose he'll even understand English?"

June gave a shout of laughter. "Well, I should smile! Now look here; don't make up your mind not to like him before you ever see him. Do you remember that man who came to the house last winter? What was his name? Well, anyway, he knew Uncle Rod and he said Max was a crackerjack."

June spoke pleasantly, but he did not understand his sister's feeling. It was only natural that he should be the more pleased at prospect of his cousin's visit.

"I don't believe he'll have a good time and I'm afraid I sha'n't like him. He was to sail on the twenty-eighth, so he may come any day. It all depends on when the steamer arrives at Boston. Mother is going to write him in care of the steamship company, but she hardly thinks the letter will reach him because the mails here are so uncertain."

"I'll venture he'll never get it," observed her brother. "It will be great to have a fellow of my own age around, especially if he's good sport. But see here, Polly Anne, this 'll make some difference to our writing that play we planned. Max won't care for that, so we'll call it off. He'll want to tramp and explore."

June, looking beyond his sister in the stern, did not

notice the sudden change that swept her face. Not write that play? Why, they had talked of it all winter!

"Oh, June!" she began, her voice quivering with eagerness, "let's not give that up! I've Lady Rosamond all thought out. And that's ours,— yours and mine. It's absolutely nothing to Max, and I don't want to give it up because he's coming. Surely, there'll be time enough!"

"Oh, we can do it another summer," said June easily, still quite unconscious of her dismay. "Max and I'll need the time for all sorts of stunts. Of course," he added, "they'll probably be things you can do, too. But you know, Polly Anne, trying to write a play isn't the sort of thing every fellow likes. Max most likely would think us a couple of loonies. Really, I think we'd better not even mention it."

His sister was silent and June did not suspect how deeply his indifference hurt her. Far quicker than her brother intellectually, she openly cherished ambitions of some day becoming a great author. Compositions and themes had no terrors for Hope, lessons in literature proved unalloyed pleasure, and encouraged by the praise of her teachers she was always ready to plume her unfledged literary wings for a fresh flight. These aspirations were hardly shared by June, but the friendship between the two was so strong that it always sufficed to make him regard her efforts with tolerance and sometimes to try to equal them.

Hope had tramped, fished, studied, played with her brother; all her life had been everything to him that a good comrade could be. He had welcomed her on many an expedition and shared many boyish plans from which the average sister would have been debarred. Perhaps the two were the more congenial because they were so different. June with his merry blue eyes and keen sense of fun was singularly serene and sweet-tempered. As for Hope, her sensitive, clear-cut face and glorious auburn hair were the outward symbols of a versatile disposition and a hot temper. Hope could be either a friend worth having or a most peppery little foe.

June's last careless words still rang in her ears as she sat silently in the boat. To think that he could so easily throw over her cherished plan just on the supposition that their cousin might not care for it! Hope registered an inward vow never to speak of that play again the whole vacation long. The coming of Max was already casting a shadow before!

With difficulty Hope swallowed her disappointment and made an effort to speak naturally.

"I know Max will think things are queer," she observed at length.

"Well, I suppose we might think so, if we'd always lived in Europe, but it doesn't follow that he'll be stuck up or disagreeable."

June's leisurely strokes had brought the *Dart* to her

usual mooring-place, and leaving her brother to clean his fish, Hope went slowly up the path to the old farm-house they were occupying for the summer. She had enjoyed their primitive way of living, but to-day she was considering it from what she imagined would be her cousin's point of view. Max, who she supposed was accustomed to every luxury, would surely think rough bare floors beyond the pale of society, and how would the cot beds and the queer chairs strike him?

Molly, her little four-year-old sister, was playing on the stone doorstep with her doll and two fat kittens. Hope stopped to smile at the pretty picture, but her frown soon returned. Molly in blue gingham was bewitching, but she should see that Molly was dressed in white when Max came.

Mrs. Ralston was busy in the kitchen and Hope began to set the table, putting down each dish with an unusual feeling of disdain. They had been borrowed from the village hotel and were certainly quite unattractive.

"Mother!" she called presently, "don't you think we'll have a servant when Max comes?"

"I see no reason, dear. We are living so simply and when all help, it isn't hard for any of us. Why, Hope, I don't believe we spend two hours a day over the housework!"

"I know it isn't hard, but won't Max think it queer?"

"If he is like most lads of sixteen, he will think it the jolliest possible way to spend a summer, and even if he did not, that would be no reason for us to alter our way of living."

"I hope we shall like him."

"Oh, we shall! How can we help it? I have a very warm place in my heart for my Edith's boy. I wanted Max dreadfully when his mother died, but Rodney could not give him up. Poor Rodney! He was only a boy himself, too young to face that experience entirely alone, and I don't wonder he wanted to keep all he had left of Edith. But, Hope, won't it be lovely to have Max this summer? If he is at all like his parents he will be such a dear fellow! And what fun he and June will have together!"

Hope listened with some amazement to this outburst from her usually placid mother. Mrs. Ralston's cheeks were flushed and her eyes bright as she stopped to read again the letter that told of her nephew's coming.

"How I wish your father could be here for all summer instead of just a few weeks!" she continued. "It is the only thing needed now."

Hope made no comment at the time, but when her task was completed, answered Molly's call to come and see the pussies. Molly was Hope's darling, and she gathered both her and the kittens into a tight hug.

"All the same, little sister," she mused, half-aloud, "from the way Mother and June seem to feel, it looks as though things were going to be different when our cousin from Europe arrives."

CHAPTER II

THE COMING OF MAX

WHEN Maxfield Hamilton reached the North Station that July morning, it was in its usual congested condition, trains coming in with commuters, others pulling out on long distance journeys, motor trucks shooting to and fro loaded with baggage, and everywhere crowds of people. The big station and its appointments afforded him great interest, for it differed from the English and Continental service he knew so well. These powerful engines and long, low-hung cars were a contrast to those of Europe, and no first-class compartment in one of their trains could approach the luxury of this Pullman with its easy chairs, footstools and plate-glass windows.

Max settled himself for the day's journey, and presently had his attention frankly attracted to a party occupying seats opposite,— a lady dressed in deep mourning, accompanied by two young girls. The older of the two was about his own age. She had dark curly hair, brown eyes, and a face both sweet and sensible. Her evident solicitude for her fragile

mother was pretty to see. The other girl was perhaps a year younger and was beautiful in an unusual way. Dark brows and lashes shaded deep blue eyes, but her piquant little face was framed by hair of that true flaxen so seldom seen except in tiny children. There was something radiant and elusive in her expression as though a tricksy woodland spirit had chosen to masquerade as a mortal maiden. Her sister was busy in arranging everything for her mother's comfort, but the younger girl found time to notice their next neighbor, to give him an impersonal, appraising and wholly innocent glance from under level brows, exactly as one little child looks at another on first meeting.

Presently the train started, emerging before long into a country green and gold under the summer sky. For a time, Max sat intent on the landscape with its changing panorama of field and farm. Cosy New England homesteads flashed past, tall elms, glimpses of marsh and river, unfamiliar flowers appearing as streaks of bright color, daisies everywhere,— the fields were fairly buttoned down with daisies,— gray stone walls marking boundary lines, villages of detached wooden houses surmounted by white church steeples, — so unlike the placid English hamlets.

It seemed a very long time since back in England he and Dad said "*auf wiedersehen,*" a parting that hadn't been easy for either. But to argue with Fate

in the form of three physicians seemed useless even to Max's optimistic nature. Moreover, the peculiarly close attachment existing between him and his busy, scholarly father had developed in his character a certain unselfish chivalry. According to his code of ethics, "bothering Dad" wasn't fair play. After the first dismayed explosion, Max realized that the disappointment was not his alone: Dad also was sorry to be deprived of his usual companion.

Now the wide Atlantic lay behind and the summer with its new experiences and the new friends it might bring lay before. No letter from Maine reached him when the *Ivernia* docked, and Max spent the night at a Boston hotel with the English friends for whose company he had taken that especial steamer. There had been time to see a little of a new and interesting city, but the friends of the voyage had gone their way and he must go to Maine alone. Accustomed to making his own arrangements, Max was usually rather proud of his ability to relieve Dad concerning details of boats and trains, but it was a new and not wholly pleasant experience to be without a single acquaintance and on the other side of a wide ocean.

Last summer, he and Dad had camped on the Norway mountains. Only cowherds were within fifty miles, and there was not much to look at except plants, clouds, and insects. Existence was primitive, sleeping in tents and eating the strange concoctions occasion-

ally served by the Norwegian cook. Raspberries stewed in beer had been one of these odd combinations. Max had not been lonely without companions of his own age, for fishing was excellent and a guide was always at his service. When that sport palled, there were long mountain tramps to be taken with some one or other of the three scientists in the party. What a good time he did have and how sorry he was when they broke camp!

The summer previous to that had been spent in a tiny Welsh village, miles from a railway, out on a wide gorse-covered moor that stretched away to bold headlands with hard white beaches between, where the Irish Sea rolled its breakers and no one ever came. Those cliffs were full of caves, very desirable for playing pirates. Dad was writing a book that summer about which they had a very solemn agreement: he was on no account to be interrupted during the morning. But what fun they had after luncheon when the work was laid aside and Dad was at liberty to be the prince of playmates! What jolly comrades those Scotch boys and girls who were stopping in the village had proved! Why, he had the time of his life that summer!

At these recollections, Max smiled involuntarily. Perhaps Dad's prediction about this coming vacation would prove true.

The train curved, flooding his window with sun-

light. To avoid it, Max swung his chair toward the aisle, thus obtaining a good view of his opposite neighbors. He thought them most attractive and found himself wishing that his unknown cousins might promise as much in the way of companionship and fun as these two seemed to suggest. He fell to comparing them with girls known in Italy and England. Two or three could not be removed from niches where good comradeship had placed them, but in memory they scarcely seemed as dainty, as calmly self-possessed, nor so prettily dressed as these Americans, and certainly he had never seen any one quite so fascinating as that fair-haired girl.

Next, he wondered whether train etiquette in the United States permitted conversation with strangers as was the case in the small compartments of a European carriage. Reluctantly he decided that the experiment might prove risky, and since the sun still prevented full enjoyment of his window, unscrewed his pen and began a letter, in order to keep himself out of temptation.

The letter proved absorbing, for there was much to tell Dad and it was important that it should be entertaining and should give no hint that the writer was at all lonely:

"I hope I'll have a chance to see Boston again," the epistle ended. "I went all around Harvard and

wished there was time to look up some of your friends. But I expect they'd be away, seeing it's not term-time. I assimilated great hunks of Boston yesterday afternoon. Like that expression, *padre mio?* It's one I've acquired since leaving you. There are two pretty girls across the car. Isn't it sorrowful that I've not thought of an excuse to get acquainted? They look no end jolly, not a bit young-ladyfied, and probably they'd like to play with me as much as I would with them. I think I'll stand on my head in the aisle and see what happens. *Nothing happened!* And I like the way you sneaked my new fountain pen and left your old leaky one. I'll buy me a fine gold-mounted one and I won't pay for it out of my allowance either! Now, remember, you must write every single week to your angel child. If you don't he'll be homesick and probably die and then you'll be sorry!"

Absorbed in equipping the signature of this epistle with neat cherub wings, Max failed to notice the approach of the conductor. He looked up just as the portly official returned three bits of pasteboard to the dark-haired girl with some remark about changing trains. Max did not catch the name of the town nor give it a thought until the conductor, after punching and scrutinizing his own ticket, handed it back with the astonishing direction: "Change where the rest of your party do!"

Max stared. "Pardon me!" he interposed. "*Where* did you say change?"

"With the rest of your party," repeated the patient

official. Then, seeing the boy's surprised expression, he turned. "Aren't you with these ladies?" he asked, indicating the three across the aisle.

"No, I'm alone!" replied Max, looking across the car to encounter frank smiles from both girls and an interested glance from their mother.

"Your tickets are all for Newhope, so I thought you were together," said the conductor, himself smiling at his mistake. "Change at Rockland."

"That was a natural inference," said the lady pleasantly as the official passed on, for the nice boy opposite looked so amused that it seemed advisable to give both him and the girls a chance to laugh. "Newhope is so small a place that ours are perhaps the only tickets on the train."

Max made the most of this opportunity and one remark led to another until it evolved that the final destination of all was the village of Bexford. Mrs. Walker and her daughters were to board at a farmhouse, and though she did not know the Ralstons, it was probable that they might be near by. When increasing speed rendered conversation difficult, Max leaned back in his chair. He felt neither lonely nor depressed now, only aware that pleasant things were already beginning to happen. No effort was required to add a cheerful and somewhat mischievous postscript to his letter.

At Rockland, he parted from his new acquaintances,

for Mrs. Walker preferred to break her journey by remaining there over night. Max said "good-by," glad that it was probably only for the time, and made the rest of his journey by an accommodation train so slow that it was a relief to descend as the only passenger at Newhope.

"Want to get to Bexford?" inquired the solitary ticket clerk, freight agent and telegraph operator, after a curious inspection of the foreign labels on Max's luggage. "I'm sure I don't know how you're going to get there. John Purdy might drive you over to-morrow if he isn't haying, and I shouldn't wonder if he'd put you up to-night. That's his house, the long low one with the red barn. No, there isn't any hotel in Newhope; strangers most generally go to John's. I'll lock your trunk in the depot."

Max sauntered down the quiet country road, stopping more than once to gather some wayside flower that was new to him. The low farmhouse looked cosy and he proffered his request to Mrs. Purdy, who came at his knock.

"Mr. Purdy can drive you over to-morrow, but I don't see how I can take you in to-night. I'm up to my ears in butter and my hired girl's sick."

Max was a little amazed, for Mrs. Purdy showed no sign of having been near a dairy. Realizing that her remarks were figurative, he made another attempt.

"I won't be the least trouble. A bed and some bread and milk is all I want. Don't you think you could manage it?"

Mrs. Purdy hesitated. Max had a winning smile, and his boyish face looked thin and tired.

"Well, come in. It'll be pot-luck, but I'll do my best. There's a good bed,—that's one thing."

The low-ceiled chamber was spotlessly clean and the country supper seemed delicious to Max, who had camped in rough places and eaten very simple fare for weeks at a time. Mrs. Purdy was pleased with his appreciation of her buttermilk biscuits and strawberries and cream, but utterly shocked by his openly expressed admiration of the daisy-starred meadow behind the house.

"That's whiteweed!" she exclaimed, quite scandalized that a boy of his age should know no better. "It's a dreadful pest. Mr. Purdy has to fight it all the time or the grass would be killed out."

Max forebore to horrify her still further by the statement that never before to-day had he seen daisies in such numbers. He smiled at her surprise and presently quite redeemed her good opinion by his enthusiasm over her garden, gay with old-fashioned flowers. It was the one outlet for a nature that craved beauty and color, and the loving care expended upon it was a great uplift to a life cramped by circumstances into a narrow round.

"It isn't often a boy likes posies or knows much about them," she remarked at length.

Max was looking absently at a bed of cornflowers. How blue the German meadows shone with them — the *Kaiserblümen!* And the ladies' delight, little none-so-pretties,— they too were old friends, growing wild in many a Swiss valley.

"I am very fond of flowers, Mrs. Purdy," he replied, coming out of his reverie.

"Do you know, you don't talk like folks round here?" she continued, looking at him thoughtfully, for a transient guest like this tall lad was new to her experience.

"I live a long distance away," said Max, not thinking it worth while to mention so remote a place as Italy.

"You're rather young to be traveling far without any of your folks. Your mother now — you seem like a boy who has a sweet, kind mother, and you don't look over and above rugged — isn't she worried to have you away by yourself?"

"She isn't living, Mrs. Purdy," said Max gently, for his hostess had spoken wistfully and not at all as though urged by common curiosity. "She died when I was only six. I am thinner than usual just now, but I'm really very strong."

"I thought maybe your mother was living, and I knew she must be fond of you," commented Mrs.

Purdy simply. "But haven't you any one belonging to you?"

"Oh, yes, my father! We are great friends. And it is my aunt, my mother's sister, whom I'm going to visit in Bexford."

"I'm glad of that," said Mrs. Purdy. "Well, you'll have to make an early start for we can't spare a horse for all day, so you'd better go to bed before long. You've had a hard jaunt on the cars and you look tired. I'll call you when it's time, so don't have it on your mind."

Her tone was almost affectionate and Max smiled as he took her advice and went to his room. It was queer how good people always were to him!

Though the month was July, it was actually cold when he started next morning with his trunk in the back of the spring wagon, and Will Newell, a lad a little older than himself for driver. Mrs. Purdy had provided a bountiful breakfast and just as he was starting, offered him, rather shyly, a big bunch of flowers.

"You can throw them away if you want," she said, "but I thought maybe you'd like to take them along."

"Indeed, I would!" exclaimed Max, his quick sympathy touched by this gift from the hard-working woman whose flowers seemed to him the only bright spot in a dull existence. He left her smiling and waving her apron as they turned a curve.

The road proved rough, and Max soon understood why so much time had been thought necessary for a twelve-mile drive. There was scarcely a level stretch in the whole distance and walking was often preferable to being bumped over rocks and into washouts. Will proved taciturn and would talk only in monosyllables, so that Max, who was a social being, was forced to turn to the woods and the birds for entertainment. The trees were beautiful: great somber pines or occasional graceful birches and dainty little conical firs set in open rolling pastures. Birds new in plumage and song continually caught his attention.

At the top of a final steep climb, Will pointed out Lake Innisfail, on the shore of which lay the farmhouse where the Ralstons were spending the summer. Its shingled exterior was worn to a beautiful artistic gray; great elms towered in front, and there was a magnificent view over the lake, as yet unspoiled by a single summer cottage. Mr. Ralston had thought seriously of buying the old homestead, but it needed repairs so badly that it seemed wiser to test their liking for the locality by occupying it for one season as tenants. The second story was hardly habitable, but there was space enough for camping without use of the upper rooms.

As they approached, Max looked anxiously for some trace of either aunt or cousins. There was no sign of life except an insistent bumblebee in a patch of clover, and no one answered a knock, several times repeated.

"Guess they are all off fishing," Will commented, and somewhat to Max's dismay, left the trunk on the doorstep. "Better go in and make yourself at home," he added. "That's the way we do in Maine."

Max watched the carriage to the turn of the country road, walked around the house, inspected the barn, and followed a path to the shore, where he paused to admire the beautiful lake set in encircling mountains. Far in the distance was a speck that might be a boat.

There seemed nothing to do but wait. Provided with the cake of sweet chocolate he was too experienced a traveler ever to be without, Max sat down on the bank where he was joined by a friendly and affectionate kitten, appearing promptly from nowhere in particular.

"My summer surely has a queer beginning," he thought as the kitten, after refusing the politely offered refreshment, clawed its way to his shoulder. "Stow that, you little tiger! But if they truly seem glad to have me, I fancy I'll like it."

Before long the speck on the lake grew larger and changed to a boat headed directly for the pier. Max watched its approach with keen interest. Its occupants, rowing in the sunshine, could not see him in the shade of the bushes fringing the lake. In all probability that was Aunt Helen in the stern, with little Mary in her lap. The athletic fellow at the oars

must be his cousin, George, junior,— he looked good sport. If that was Hope — what stunning copper-colored hair!

As they drew near he rose, and Hope, perched in the bow, caught sight of him.

"Mother!" she exclaimed, "look! Who's that?"

The next moment the boy in the boat called to the one on the pier. "Is it Max?" came the hail.

"It's himself!" was the gay response and June bent to his oars with a vim that soon brought the *Dart* to the wharf.

"Oh, my dear boy, I'm so sorry we were not here when you came!" Mrs. Ralston exclaimed, grasping eagerly the hand extended to help her ashore. Had Max ever really doubted the warmth of his welcome his aunt's loving embrace banished every possible misgiving.

Hope looked on critically. Max was certainly good-looking; he had nice frank gray eyes, brown hair that would have curled had length permitted such frivolity, a straight nose, and looked even taller than June. His words were pronounced in a curiously distinct, clear-cut manner, but his voice was pleasant and a most engaging smile revealed handsome teeth. Still, Hope held her opinion in reserve, for the very well-made clothes he wore and his air of being perfectly at ease made her doubt his entire simplicity.

"Indeed, I wasn't troubled in the least by my lonely

arrival," Max went on in reply to his aunt's apologies. "The kitten was extremely cordial to me."

June, who had been regarding him with interest, laughed at this remark, and Molly's shy blue eyes looked inquiringly from behind Hope, for the pussies were her especial property.

"Max must be hungry after his early start," said Mrs. Ralston as they reached the house. "Hope, we'll get dinner at once. June, show your cousin the room you two are to share. We shall ask you literally a hundred questions, Max dear, but we'll give you something to eat first."

Max followed his cousin into a bare clean room furnished with two cots, an improvised bureau, a row of nails in the walls and empty boxes for seats. There were three windows, one looking into an apple tree and the others over the lake. Max gazed thoughtfully at the glistening water stretching away to the green hills, for a moment quite forgetting June. His aunt's embrace, her loving words, most of all the beautiful, motherly expression of her face, had wakened memories long dormant. Dad had told him he would find Aunt Helen like Mother; he already knew it.

"What a jolly view!" he remarked, suddenly remembering that he was not alone. "And that's a fine velvet plant you have there! I saw ever so many along the roadsides. Dad said they were common over here, but I expected to see them only in gardens."

June could not repress a sniff of disgust as he glanced at the object indicated.

"That? It's nothing but a mullein, the commonest kind of weed!"

"They'd like a few in England. There's one in Kew Gardens labeled the 'American Velvet Plant.'"

"Do they keep it under glass?" June inquired sarcastically.

"I think it likely. They would take tender care of a valuable specimen like that. I presume they only let it out during summer."

June turned and looked at him suspiciously, but Max met his gaze with an expression of child-like innocence. For a long half-moment the cousins stared each other straight in the eyes. Then, recognizing kindred spirits, both burst into irrepressible laughter.

June was the first to regain composure. "Come on out and play ball till dinner is ready," he suggested. "I'm as stiff as a poker after sitting in that boat so long."

Max threw aside his coat and followed to the lawn, but was decidedly disconcerted to find his cousin's play too rapid for him. After weeks of enforced inactivity, his relaxed muscles would not respond to the demand made upon them. Try as he might, he could not equal the ease or certainty of June's aim.

"I'm more used to bowling," he remarked after a while, his face flushing with discomfiture. "We play

cricket more, you know, and in that the rules bar your style of throwing."

"Cricket always seems a tame performance to me," replied June. "Of course I haven't played it much," he added hastily.

"It isn't exactly tame," said his cousin dryly. "In fact, it's rather more a game of skill than —"

Max stopped to catch a ball sent with a vim that made his palm tingle. "I say!" he exclaimed, shaking his hand, "you certainly have the dandy biceps, though!"

"That ball really is too hard to handle without gloves," said June, pleased at the tribute. "We'll stop, for we're likely to put a finger out. I've an extra catcher's mitt and I'll look it up. Here's a good bough for chinning one's self. Can you do that?"

"I could once," answered Max, "but probably I can't now," he added, half-aloud, as he grasped the bough and tried to draw himself up. He succeeded twice but the third attempt proved a flat failure. In mortified silence he released his hold and watched his cousin easily perform ten times in succession the feat dear to all boyish hearts.

"Give me a chance a little later, June!" he exclaimed good-naturedly though with a tone of disgust. "I'm not quite such a duffer as this looks! I've been down and out for weeks past, you see. You have me beaten

on the first round, but give me time to work up my muscle and I'll be heard from again!"

"As long as you need!" assented June cordially, liking his cousin still better for this plucky acceptance of a situation obviously humiliating.

CHAPTER III

TO THE TOP OF BALDFACE

THREE mornings later Max awoke very early. After the first night he suggested to June that sleeping out of doors was "no end jolly" and that cots could be easily transported to the shelter of the big apple-tree. June, who had already decided that his cousin was a "sport," acquiesced at once and the room overlooking the lake was abandoned except for purposes of dressing.

Max sat up and looked around him. The sun had not yet reached the cottage but its rays were lighting the top of Baldface whose slopes rose from the farther side of the lake. The water itself was smooth and placid, just turning from gray to silver and a soft white mist was curling away before the coming sun. The beauty of the morning appealed to Max and for some moments he sat enjoying the long shadows and dew-covered vines and grass. Suddenly from around a pile of logs came a small red animal.

"I say, June!" Max exclaimed in a whisper, slightly shaking the recumbent form of his cousin.

"It's only a fox!" remarked June, aroused from

slumber. "They are not dangerous. It won't attack you."

"Attack your grandmother!" retorted Max. "I've seen a few foxes before this. Does any one around here preserve them?"

"Preserve them?" repeated June, for a second honestly bewildered. "Oh, yes!" he ended with a shout of laughter. "Mother does them up with lemon. Some people use onions. I myself prefer them skinned and preserved with horse-radish!"

Max stared. The New England use of the verb "preserve" as opposed to that of Old England was unknown to him, but he saw that in some way he had "made a break" and that the break appeared to be a bad one. For an instant he was annoyed by June's shaking shoulders but Max was possessed both of self-control and common-sense. Moreover, he liked his cousin. The next moment June's cot began to creak and groan. Its occupant, hampered by the blankets, was somewhat at a disadvantage under the sudden onslaught. His hasty turn landed the wrestling figures in the wet grass.

Mrs. Ralston, already awakened by Molly, heard the commotion and looked from her window to see both cots overturned, bed-clothes and pillows scattered to the winds and her son and nephew engaged apparently in mortal combat in the early dawn. For an instant she was horrified but her concern vanished

before the bursts of laughter that reached her ears. Evidently the fight, though ardent, was good-natured.

Three minutes later a treaty of peace was concluded and the two started most amiably toward the lake for a morning swim.

"Now, make a note that to 'preserve' anything over here means to put it up in air-tight cans with a lot of sugar," teased June.

"Cans?" asked Max. "What are cans?"

"Well, that's another good one!" exclaimed June to the landscape in general. "Max, it isn't six o'clock yet. If you keep on like this all day, you'll be the finish of me!"

"If you mean 'tins' why don't you say so? We have tinned fruits in England."

"They are not tin; they're glass!" June expostulated.

"Then they aren't cans!" insisted Max. "A 'can' is a covered thing with a wire handle over the top."

"That's a pail!" interrupted June, bursting into helpless mirth. By this time the verbal tangle seemed too complicated for explanation.

"Oh, I say!" laughed Max. "I fancy I'd better send for a dictionary and learn to speak English."

"That's just the trouble!" June retorted. "You *do* speak English. I'm the one who needs the dictionary. Never mind, old chap, we'll do our best to

understand your speech and supply your simple wants. Oh, but it was a lucky day, my cousin Maxfield, when you struck this place! I foresee a happy summer for little June!"

"What a frolic you boys were having this morning!" remarked Mrs. Ralston, smiling at the two as they came in for breakfast.

"Yes'm!" said June with a reminiscent grin. "And we're planning another. Max wants to climb Baldface. He's perfectly possessed to get on top of that little pile of dirt. It's a dandy day for it. We could see miles out to sea."

"We thought we could have a picnic, Auntie," Max explained. "Take our luncheon, you know, and you and Hope come, too. And isn't there any one else to invite?"

"Mother!" burst out Hope, "mayn't we ask those two girls who are staying at the red farmhouse? You know we spoke with them the other evening in the postoffice."

"That would be very pleasant," assented her mother. "They seemed such nice girls and there are so few young people around here that the sooner you are acquainted, the better."

"Girls?" said June, laying down his fork. "What girls?"

"Charlotte and Anstice Walker," explained Hope. "They came day before yesterday to the Tylers'.

They live near Boston. You needn't be so exclusive, June. I'd like to have them go."

"So would I," said Max quickly.

June shook his head, with a doubtful air. "Max," he inquired solemnly, "do you like girls?"

"Some girls," replied his cousin cautiously. "And I'd like to meet American ones. I have seen some, of course, but I'd like to know them here in the United States."

"Go ahead and ask them, Hope," said June, picking up his fork with an air of resignation. "If Max wants to make a scientific study of American girls, it's plainly our duty to provide him with specimens. Investigate all you please, Max. I'll stand by to take notes."

"June, your cousin won't know what to make of you," remonstrated Mrs. Ralston.

"Mother, don't worry," said her son. "Max appears fairly intelligent."

"I know he's only rotting, Auntie," Max hastened to reassure her.

This innocent remark and its unintentional application sent June into apparent convulsions. Max grew red but finally smiled.

"That's one on you!" groaned June, recovering himself at last. "Don't mind me, old fellow. I'm taken this way sometimes. But I sure am going to

send home for a dictionary. Oh, Mother, don't look so surprised! I'll be good now."

June subsided with a chuckle. His keen sense of fun was an inheritance from his father. Even as a little boy he derived considerable amusement from the dilemmas in which he found he could often place his literal, easy-going mother. It was strange that Mrs. Ralston, married to a joking husband and the mother of a teasing son, should still possess so slight an appreciation of the ridiculous, but as a matter of fact she never grew accustomed to the airy banter in which the rest of her family indulged and would frequently, as June expressed it, rush out to apply an oil-can to waters that really were not in the least troubled.

"Let me help with the sandwiches, Auntie," Max suggested when breakfast was over. "I've had extensive experience in providing luncheon for an all-day tramp."

Hope looked up quickly. Max had already astonished her several times by some revelation which indicated that his life had not all been spent, as she supposed, in the midst of untold luxury. He had given no indication of despising their primitive way of living, had taken everything for granted, and promptly followed June's example of helping with the work. In fact, Hope had experienced surprise, not

unmixed with scorn, at her cousin's unaffected enjoyment of very simple pleasures.

Hope set off to deliver her invitation and Max followed his aunt into the kitchen where she moved about, collecting material for sandwiches.

"Max, dear," she said as she began to cut the bread, "you mustn't take June too seriously. He is a terrible tease, but he wouldn't really hurt your feelings for the world."

"Why, it doesn't hurt me, Auntie," Max answered with a smile of amusement. "June and I hit it off capitally. It's just because we have arrived at an understanding that he's ragging me. And I'm used to chaffing. June's going to get his full share."

The worried expression that marked Mrs. Ralston's face vanished as he spoke.

"I've never been a boy, Max, so I didn't understand," she said in a tone of relief, "but if that's the case, it's all right and I won't worry."

Her nephew started to say something further, but stopped as he saw June appearing in the doorway.

"Max," he asked, "did Mr. Beach say whether there is a spring on the mountain?"

"Yes, he said there is one at the top. He gave me no end of directions. We are to take the road leading to the village and start in behind Mr. Clark's house. We are also to keep on the left of the stone

wall that runs nearly up the mountain and on no account to cross it."

"Why?" inquired June.

"Because there is a man on the opposite side of the mountain who pastures his cattle there, and sometime the 'critters' aren't all cows!" replied Max, with a comical imitation of the old farmer's tone. "He gave me to understand that the top was pervaded by a bull the size of the Trojan horse! I'm not sure that he hasn't four horns and a pair of wings!"

"Whew! You'd better not tell the girls!" advised June with a side glance at his mother.

"Oh, boys, do you suppose it is safe?" she inquired nervously.

"Auntie, Mr. Beach hasn't personally climbed Baldface for twenty years. Probably the bones of that bull are bleaching on the sands of time!"

"Anyway, Mother, all we have to do is to keep on the right side of the wall."

"The right side being the left in this case," commented Max. "I wish I had not said that if it is going to trouble you, Auntie."

"Oh, I shall not worry, Max, only don't take any risks."

Before the lunch was quite prepared, Hope dashed in, rather breathless from her run and with a most animated face.

"They'll go, Mother, and they seemed so pleased!

Mrs. Walker came herself to speak with me. She's been ill and that's why she and the girls have come to such a quiet place to spend the summer. I'm so glad we asked them for I know I'm going to like them, especially Anstice. She's a dear, and the prettiest thing I ever saw! And Mrs. Walker wanted to help put up the lunch but when she went to ask about it, Mrs. Tyler didn't have much bread. So they are going to bring some stuffed eggs and cake because Mrs. Tyler makes the best cake in all the township!"

"Max," interposed June gravely, "I'm glad you are desirous of making a study of American girls."

Max grinned, quite as much at his own thoughts as at June's comment. Mrs. Ralston paid no attention to the remark.

"There, I think everything is ready. June, you might put the paper drinking cups in your pocket so as to have them convenient. Molly, you couldn't possibly climb that mountain. Mother is to stay at home; only the 'big children' are going on this picnic."

Charlotte and Anstice were not long in making their preparations. To the amazement of the Ralstons they and Max met with smiles of recognition.

"We got acquainted on the train," Charlotte explained. "Mamma wished me to thank you for asking us," she added, turning to Mrs. Ralston. "She would be so glad to see you and the little girl

while we are gone. She isn't able to walk much, but there's a lovely grove behind the Tylers' with our hammocks and a swing Molly might like."

"Why, I think that would be charming!" replied Mrs. Ralston cordially. "We will go down this afternoon, for the mountain party will hardly return until towards sunset."

"Max, you snide!" scoffed June, pulling his cousin aside while Charlotte was speaking. "The idea of your scraping acquaintance with those girls before you'd been twenty-four hours in the United States! Pretty rapid work! No wonder you wanted them to go! Next, you'll tell me they began it."

"*I* certainly didn't," Max retorted, his eyes brimming with laughter. "I thought I'd surprise you."

"You have!" June admitted in grudging admiration. "But don't let it occur again!"

The expedition started amid a chorus of good-byes and waving handkerchiefs. Molly and Mrs. Ralston watched them around the curve. Charlotte's conical Mexican hat showed a moment later over a low hedge, and then the two were alone except for the bees and pussies.

"June, have you never been up this mountain?" Max inquired. "You were here last summer; didn't you climb it?"

"We were in Bexford and only drove over here. You know as much about it as I do."

"Oh, look at the apples!" interrupted Anstice. "Don't you believe they'd give us a few?"

"They do look nice," said Hope. "I love those red astrachans. June, do ask if we may have some."

"Now, look here!" began her brother. "You had your breakfast not an hour ago and we've loads of lunch —"

"And loads of time!" put in Max. "I could do with some of those myself. I'll acquire a few, Hope."

"Land! yes, take all you want," said Mrs. Lincoln, wiping her hands on her apron as she replied to Max's knock. "They're just being wasted. Another time you needn't trouble to ask, but help yourself. What are you going to do, climb Baldface? Well, now, do be careful; they say Randall's bull is in the mountain pasture."

The busy housewife left her steaming dishes to accompany them into the orchard and herself point out the tree bearing the most desirable fruit. Sweater sleeves were converted into apple bags and the boys filled their pockets.

"The people in this place are perfectly delightful!" said Charlotte as they left the orchard. "Think of her coming 'way out here and not letting us pay a cent!"

"It must be because it is the country," suggested Hope, but Max smiled. He had traveled far and wide and it was his experience that people the world over

are much alike in being kind and friendly. This conviction, and the fact that one can be at home in any place, were two bits of philosophy which sixteen years of life had already taught him.

The road soon branched in either direction around the base of Baldface. A short distance along the right-hand curve was the Clark farm with its white house and weather-beaten barn where the doors at either end stood hospitably open and framed a charming picture of green meadows and the sparkling lake beyond.

"How I do like barns!" exclaimed Anstice, making a detour in order to step over its broad sill. "It looks like a place where there should be kittens!"

There was a commotion near at hand and for a second Anstice was startled, but she soon saw that there was no cause for fear.

"Oh, girls, here's the dearest little calf you ever saw! Bossy, don't be afraid; I only want to pat you!"

"He'll choke to death," said June as the calf, frightened by the appearance of more unknown beings, pulled back with all his might against the leather collar.

"Nan, do let him alone! He's killing himself!" protested Charlotte, alarmed by the calf's agonized attitude and protruding eyes.

Anstice was at length detached from the calf and

the procession took its way through a field that Mr. Clark had recently mown. The hay had been gathered into a big rick around a central pole, and the farmer and his hired man were putting on the last layers with great care, sloping them scientifically and packing them firmly so as to form a roof that would shed water and keep the interior of the stack sweet and wholesome.

Beyond the meadow lay a pasture, and here their progress was slow, for the wild strawberries were still abundant.

"I wish they weren't so small," said Max after a while. "It takes more than fifteen to make a taste."

"I didn't know I sat on one," murmured Hope, looking reflectively at her skirt.

"Wasn't it more than one?" inquired Max mischievously. "Judging from the number it takes to make a mouthful, you must have sat on several to cover that area."

There was no reply and Max dropped back. It was becoming evident to him that Hope, for some reason, did not respond to his advances. He did not understand why, since he and June were already such good comrades, but Hope not only held herself aloof, but discouraged Molly's growing fondness for her cousin.

The climb grew harder and steeper as they left the strawberry patches behind. Rocks and crackling gray moss and huckleberry bushes became more frequent,

interspersed with occasional small trees and shrubs. The southern and western sides of Baldface were heavily wooded, but on the northern slope it was possible to reach the summit without leaving the pastures which had been more or less cleared, except for a few rods up the ledges that crowned the top.

They stopped at last in a blueberry patch, where the early varieties were already ripe; great silvery blue globules, the largest and sweetest seeming to grow on the most stunted plants.

June and the girls wandered slowly as they picked and ate, but Max lay down to rest on the sloping mountain side. They were now at the base of the ledge that formed the summit of Baldface and to the south and east there was a wonderful view. Just below lay the village, looking like a collection of toy houses with a steeple in their midst. Mr. Clark, raking hay, seemed like a good-sized ant, while his inch-long white horse was attached to a cart of corresponding dimensions. Lake Innisfail lay to the right like a sheet of glass set in tiny trees, and in front rose the softly rounded hills. Beyond, a stretch of the blue Atlantic was broken by darker patches that were really islands, and far to the left were the misty summits of Mt. Desert.

The long, hot climb had tired Max more than he cared to acknowledge, for he was still not strong.

Had his aunt realized just how ill he had been during the previous winter, the mountain picnic would doubtless have been postponed to a later date. He was glad to rest and watch the silent hills and the far, blue ocean where trailing cloud shadows made curious patches of shade. A long, lingering streak of smoke showed the course of a passing steamer, though the boat itself had disappeared behind a headland, and in the offing, the sunlight was reflected from a white sail.

Though he saw and keenly appreciated the beauty of the scene before him, Max's thoughts were far away. The lovely hills and lakes of Maine were thousands of miles distant from the big gray steamer down in the Red Sea, whither his fancy had transported him. By this time, Dad had probably lost at least two note-books and mislaid several more! He would find out what it was to take that trip without his "angel child" who, at least, had a good memory for such small articles, whatever his shortcomings might be!

Max's revery was broken by wild shrieks from Hope and Anstice, who had stumbled on a snake. Though it was perfectly harmless and quite as frightened as they, the girls insisted on leaving the blueberry patch at once.

Now came the only genuine climbing of the day, a hard scramble up bare ledges for a hundred feet or

more, so difficult that all were hot and breathless when they reached the storm-exposed summit. It was a barren spot, open to the winds of heaven, grooved by the glaciers of an earlier age and worn and polished by snow and rain. There was a westerly breeze that they had not felt before, and after walking around the mountain's crown, and counting the eleven silver lakes to be seen, they were glad to find a more sheltered place for luncheon.

"How hungry I am!" sighed Max as the boxes were opened.

"I'm simply ravenous!" said Charlotte.

"Well, I'm past speaking; I'm merely suffering!" commented June, sinking into an attitude of feigned exhaustion, too feeble even to grasp the sandwich Hope offered. "Do you call that a sandwich? You'd better give me six, or maybe nine, and then perhaps I can feel them in my fingers."

"How hungry I *was!*" Max remarked twenty minutes later when olives and cake were no longer in demand.

The others smiled. Somehow, they all felt very well acquainted after the informal meal.

"Isn't it curious," said Charlotte, "that you are never as hungry on a picnic as you think you are going to be, and yet you can eat things you don't care about at home! I don't much like stuffed eggs, but they taste good here."

Max gave an amused laugh, apparently not so much at what Charlotte said as at some recollection.

"What's the joke?" inquired June. "If it's a story we want to hear it. What's the use of having a cousin who's been everywhere and seen everything if he never tells you about it? It's three days now since you came, and everything you've told us has been dragged out of you by violence. I'm perfectly exhausted asking questions! What were you grinning at?"

"It was something Charlotte's remark reminded me of," explained Max, "about eating things you didn't like when there wasn't anything else. It isn't much of a story and at the time it didn't seem as funny as it did afterwards, but I'll tell you if you like."

CHAPTER IV

SOME STORIES AND A THUNDER STORM

"LAST fall," began Max as he settled himself comfortably in a bed of dried moss, "Dad and I went to England. We had been all summer in Norway but Dad had business in London, and, as I didn't have to begin school until October, I was still with him. We landed in Newcastle and went to Durham because I had never seen the cathedral. Immediately, Dad met some people whom he knew well. They insisted that we should come and stop over night at their country place some miles out of town, so we went in the motor they sent for us.

"There was quite a large party stopping in the house and Dad knew most of them, for he goes to ever so many such places. I myself was prepared to take a back seat, for over in England you aren't of much account until you're really grown up.

"We reached the house and it was a jolly big one with dandy grounds and a huge park. Lady Mary was in the hall to welcome us, and she turned me over at once to her daughter Winifred. She was about my

age and was evidently waiting there with her mother on purpose to look after me. She was scared blue, though she was trying hard not to let me know.

"She took me to the nursery where the other children were having tea. There were a lot of them, jolly kids, with a housemaid waiting on the table and the head nurse presiding over it. She was a nice, pleasant sort of person, but most fearfully proper. The kiddies made a place for me and I looked to see what I might devour but there wasn't a thing on the table but bread and milk!"

"Was that all they had?" demanded Anstice in deep interest.

"Tea and bread and butter were brought for the nurse and Winifred and me, but the kids didn't have even that! I never eat butter and I don't care much for milk, and I was hungry enough to eat a hat!"

"What did you do about it?" inquired Charlotte. "Wasn't it impolite not to give a guest anything else?"

"It wasn't really, because English children are very simply brought up and they thought me only a kid, too, and it would never occur to them to offer me anything they didn't think suitable for their own children," explained Max. "I was rather wrathy for a minute, but I knew I had to rise to the occasion, so in I sailed!"

"On what?" asked June. "Bread and butter?"

"No, bread and milk. I really was frightfully

hungry and angry, too, so I ate a whole loaf of bread just to astonish the kids and shock the nurse!"

Max stopped, for even Hope was laughing.

"Did you succeed?" asked Anstice when the merriment subsided.

"Rather. The kiddies watched with eyes as big as saucers and I knew it was the most interesting thing that had happened to them that day. The nurse seemed worried and inquired if I was accustomed to eat so heartily at that hour. I told her I never ate more than a loaf at a meal, and then Winifred choked, and the others all caught on and began to giggle. The nurse rather sat on them, but after that we had a nice time. Winifred thawed and was no end of fun, and she and I and all the kiddies went and saw the ponies and the dogs and the deer in the park and had a great old frolic. There were three jolly little chaps and two girls besides Winifred. They had a governess, but she was ill that day so we could go by ourselves. That was all about the bread and milk, but the whole visit was rather funny."

Max paused, but his audience at once demanded that he should continue his story.

"The children had to go in to bed quite soon, and then Winifred and I walked around the rose garden. That was stunning! It must be wonderful in the season for roses. It stays light ever so long in England through the summer and fall, so we stopped out some

time and when we came in, we looked at books. At nine, a maid brought a tray with two glasses and napkins and some zwieback on a plate and a jug of milk."

"What's zwieback?" inquired Anstice, who was lazily pulling a daisy apart.

"It's bread that has been dried a second time in the oven until it is all crisp and brown. It's terribly hygienic, but I felt like a bread pudding after eating it!" laughed Max.

"Winifred was sorry, but it was her bedtime, so she rang for a maid to show me to my room and I perceived that I also was expected to go to bed. It was a pleasant room, quite small, but very decent. I was awfully anxious to see Dad, so I asked the maid if she could show me where his room was. She didn't know, but she inquired of some one and showed me the door. It was only a speck of a way from mine, so after I had undressed, I put on my dressing-gown and took a book Winifred had lent me and stole down the corridor to it. It was a dandy room, lots larger than mine, with a jolly little fire in the grate and an electric reading lamp. I read quite a while and was just growing sleepy when I happened to look up and saw something that scared me perfectly stiff!"

"Was it a ghost?" exclaimed Charlotte eagerly.

"No, it wasn't, but a ghost wouldn't have startled me any more. All over the dressing table were a lot

of silver toilet articles that never belonged to *my* father! There was a frilly white thing spread on the bed and a pair of small slippers and a blue wrapper that certainly weren't his!"

"Great Billikins!" roared June, convulsed with amusement at this trying situation.

"Go on!" commanded Anstice. "Whose room was it?"

"I never stopped to see. I bagged my book and fled! I rushed down the corridor as if a ghost *was* after me!" laughed Max. "The worst of it was that I never looked to see where I was going, and when I stopped, I hadn't the remotest idea where my own room was. I didn't dare open any doors and it wasn't any too warm promenading around attired in pajamas and a thin dressing-gown."

"Oh, this is rich!" said June, sitting up and wiping his eyes. "What happened next?"

"It wasn't so funny at the time, for I was awfully afraid of meeting some one, and it was one of those tremendous old English houses where you can easily get lost. I wandered around the corridor for some time, trying to find a door that looked like the location of my room. Finally a maid came from a passage and left the door open. She was going in the opposite direction, so I stole along until I could look in, and there was a fire and a light and in the next room, two little cribs with the tiniest kiddies, so I knew I had

blundered on the night nursery. I sat down by the fire, for I was really chilled, and soon the nurse who had been at the table came. She didn't seem at all surprised to find me there, only asked at once if I was ill and if she could do anything for me. I told her I went to find my father's room and lost my own, and saw the babies and the fire and came in to get warm. She seemed troubled because I was cold, and offered to get me some hot milk!" ended Max with a merry laugh.

"Did you tell her you weren't a cat?" inquired Charlotte as the amusement was echoed by the others.

"No, but I declined firmly, for I'd had milk enough! She told me to stay until I was thoroughly warm and then she'd take me to my room. When I reached it, I asked her where Dad's was, and she showed me. It was in the same location as the one I'd been in, only across the hall, exactly opposite. It was then long after ten, and when the nurse had gone, I went to Dad's room. This time I made sure it was his, for his things were unpacked and laid out. I wanted awfully to see him but I was desperately sleepy, so I established myself in the exact center of his bed, thinking when he came, he'd have to wake me. The next I knew, it was broad daylight and Dad was asleep beside me. When he came up about two, he shoved me over one side of the bed and I never woke. I told

him the sufferings I'd endured and the gallons of milk I'd drunk, and all my adventures. He thought it a great joke, and while we were having fun over it a man came to build the fire and bring tea for Dad. He looked more than surprised to see me there! Dad was such a brick; he told the man he felt uncommonly hungry and asked if he could have some toast and a couple of eggs. The servant was as grave as a judge, but he evidently caught on, for he brought the eggs and stacks of toast and some cold meat, too!

"After all," concluded Max, "I needn't have bothered him, for the kids had oatmeal porridge and eggs and toast for breakfast and there was bacon for Winifred and me. We didn't leave till after luncheon which Winifred and I had with the older people. It was a swell lunch and the people were tremendously interesting too, so on the whole I had a fine time. Still, I'd had milk enough to last me a long while!"

"It must be great fun to travel so much," said Charlotte a little wistfully. "Having such interesting things happen makes it seem much nicer than just staying at home."

"It isn't all fun," replied Max rather soberly. "I think nothing can be nicer than a real family where you truly belong. Sometimes I get awfully tired and lonesome, too, for often Dad is very busy. Some days he scarcely has time to speak to me, but then there are other times when we have great fun together, and of

course I'd rather be with him, no matter how little time he has for me."

"Don't you go to school?" inquired Charlotte.

"Oh, yes! always in the winter to a school in Rome. The headmaster is an Englishman and most of the boys are English or have English mothers. I've been there nearly every winter since I was eight years old, just a little bit of a chap. Last fall I was ill after we reached London, and so we had to stop there, and it was a long time before I could be moved. Then we went to the island of Jersey. Dad was simply obliged to go back to Rome, so he left me with some English people we've known a long time and I stopped with them till just before coming over here."

"Tell us about them," said June, who was making a minute caterpillar take long and purposeless journeys over two twigs.

"There's not much to tell. Colonel Lisle is a retired army officer and they have a lovely home outside the town of St. Helier's. Their only son was killed in South Africa during the Boer war. They have a daughter, Constance, about my age, and they're in Rome every winter so I know them well. Mrs. Lisle is the sweetest person you ever saw, and Connie and I are great chums. They were certainly good to me.

"There is a beautiful beach at St. Helier's — the 'sands' we call it — and out in the harbor is a castle on a rock about three-quarters of a mile from shore.

The tide goes out ever so far and when it is low you can walk over on a causeway to Castle Elizabeth. Connie and her governess, Mrs. Ferris, and I used to spend hours and hours on the sands reading and watching the children playing and paddling. One day after I grew stronger, Connie and I went over to the castle. They wouldn't let us in — it is occupied by soldiers — because there was scarlet fever in the garrison, so we sat on the rocks. The pools in them were full of the loveliest sea anemones, all colors. They were just like living flowers. When they were touched they would draw back their waving tentacles and shut in a tight ball. We gave them snails to eat. I suppose it was hard on the snails, but there wasn't anything else and Connie thought it was deceitful just to feed them pebbles."

"What does Connie look like?" inquired Anstice.

"She is fair, like most English girls, and she has very long, heavy, light hair that hangs over her shoulders as they all wear it. She is good sport, too. When we were in Rome she and I used to start with Mrs. Ferris for a walk, and somehow it often happened that Mrs. Ferris was inadvertently lost and Connie and I would poke around and explore by ourselves. She was a good-natured sort and hardly ever told of us, but unluckily on one of these occasions when we'd lost her, we turned a corner directly into Colonel Lisle and Dad! Connie and I were sent home

at once and given distinctly to understand that the next time Mrs. Ferris was left in the lurch, something unpleasant was likely to happen to both of us!"

"Are there English soldiers in that castle?" asked June.

"Yes, Jersey belongs to England, though it's so near France that French is spoken ever so much. Many of the nuns who were expelled from France have taken refuge there. On clear days we could see the spire of the cathedral of Coutances across the channel. There are soldiers both in Castle Elizabeth and in the fort at St. Helier's. There was an early morning service at the English church purposely for the soldiers and they attended in their scarlet uniforms and the band used to play. Connie and I liked to go to garrison service instead of the regular one."

Max stopped to smile before continuing his tale. "The soldiers occupied the nave and the other people sat in the transepts at right angles to them, so we could see them plainly. Once, we had been reading Kipling's 'Soldiers Three' and during the sermon we were trying to pick out a soldier who looked as we imagined Mulvaney did. We found one and were whispering quietly about him, both of us looking at him, when suddenly Mulvaney winked at us!

"Unluckily, we both laughed and Mrs. Ferris was shocked. She could stand a good deal, but laughing in church was a fearful breach of the proprieties.

She made me change seats with her at once and it took both of us most of the way home to coax her into forgiving us. She wouldn't go with us to garrison service again!"

"Tell us about your school," demanded Anstice.

"I think I've already talked too much," said Max, coloring a little. "Dad often says that I do, and I'm trying to reform."

"Don't begin now!" remonstrated June. "We really want to hear. Remember we are all prosaic people who never have adventures. It is your plain duty to enlarge our horizons in a proper missionary spirit. Let's hear about that school. Who is the principal?"

"We call him the headmaster. His name is Thornley."

"Is he nice?"

"Yes, he is; he's entirely top-notch. He isn't married; I believe the girl he was engaged to died very tragically somehow not long before the wedding day, but he has the dearest old mother, with such a sweet face and the whitest hair! She's just like a picture and she always wears a lace cap and old-fashioned diamond rings. Mr. Thornley took holy orders and I think, had a charge at one time."

"Oh, my suffering sisters!" interrupted June. "Trot along that dictionary!"

"I know what he means," said Charlotte, catching

Max's puzzled glance. "He was a clergyman and had a parish."

"Yes," continued Max, "but Mrs. Thornley can't stay in England during the winter, and so they went to Rome. I think Mr. Thornley doesn't have to teach unless he chooses, but he is still quite young — about forty — and he likes boys and prefers to do something, so has this school. There are other English masters and two or three who come to teach special languages. The Thornleys have an apartment in the same hotel where Dad and I live, and when Dad's away, as he often is, I am with them a good deal. Mr. Thornley came to see me in Jersey this spring and it is possible that he's coming over to the States in August. If he does, we shall go back together. He's tremendously nice, only he thinks I'm lazy! I suppose I am!" admitted Max frankly. "Sometimes he comes down on me rather hard about that, but next to Dad, I like better to be with him than with any one else. Now, really, I think it is time some one else talked."

"Oh, please tell us some more about Connie!" begged Anstice. "How I should like to see an English girl! Are they really very different from us?"

"They don't have such pretty frocks as American girls," said Max a little shyly. "I don't know what the difference is, but it's so, and English girls are usually much harder to get acquainted with. Connie

has lived abroad so much that she's not so awfully English. She'd been in Italy so long that she was always forgetting that every one in Jersey could understand what she said. Once she and Mrs. Lisle and I were together and Connie stopped right in front of a policeman and said, 'Look, Mamma! here's a real, live, English bobby!' She was terribly disconcerted when the policeman touched his helmet and said, 'Yes, miss!'"

"And can you speak all sorts of different languages?" asked Charlotte.

"No, indeed! Dad speaks about fifteen but I know only the ordinary ones," acknowledged Max reluctantly, for somehow he did not like to admit that French, German and Italian came as easily as English to his tongue. Having spoken them since childhood, they cost him absolutely no effort and seemed to him no remarkable accomplishment.

"I can't imagine any one ever knowing so much!" sighed Charlotte, whose struggles with foreign languages were strenuous. "Fifteen! It doesn't seem possible!"

"Uncle Rod is a marvel," said June, who for some time had been listening to sounds apparently on the other side of the summit. "I say, Max, did you notice a stone wall on the way up?"

This innocent query brought Max to his feet with an exclamation in German that sounded decidedly slangy.

To the surprise of the girls both he and June at once disappeared over the crown of the mountain.

"Where are you going and what about a wall?" called Hope, but the boys did not hear.

"Isn't Max interesting?" remarked Anstice as their footsteps became inaudible.

"I think he's awfully conceited," said Hope bluntly.

Charlotte looked surprised. She was older than the other girls and owing to her father's death and her mother's invalidism, responsibility had fallen early upon her shoulders.

"Why, Hope, did you think so? He didn't talk till we urged him and then he only told funny, interesting things in such a pleasant simple way."

Hope's lips shut in a straight line. She knew that Charlotte spoke truly, but she was prejudiced against her cousin.

"It must be nice," went on Charlotte, her eyes fixed dreamily on the distant horizon, "to be really in the places you've read about, where so much history was made, and to meet such interesting people. Just think of going to school, an everyday school, in Rome!"

"Well, I suppose they have to study even if they do live in Rome," said the more practical Anstice. "I don't suppose Latin's any easier if you have seen the Forum!"

"When Nan and I were little," continued Charlotte, "we used to talk after we were put to bed about what

we were going to do when we grew up, and I always said I wanted to live in Italy. Don't you remember, Nan?"

"Oh, yes, but I didn't care much about that. I liked it better when you'd describe to me all the clothes you were going to have when you were big. Sometimes you'd imagine them for me, and I remember how mad I was because you wouldn't pretend a train for my first ball dress!"

"Yes," laughed Charlotte, "you were so angry that you cried, and Mother came to see what the matter was."

"You were awfully mean about that ball dress! I wanted diamonds on it and you made it with wreaths of roses and no train and only one measly little star in my hair. It was a hateful old dress and I don't wonder I yelled!"

Even after the lapse of years, Anstice seemed still to feel vindictive about that imaginary garment, and the others laughed at the warmth of her tone.

"Did you find the stone wall?" inquired Hope as the boys reappeared.

"There is one, but it is all in piles with great gaps between," replied her brother. "It couldn't keep in an enterprising calf."

"Is there a calf over there?" asked Anstice, preparing to pursue if the answer should be affirmative.

"Only some sheep and Angora goats," said Max,

sitting down again. "They'll be a nuisance if they come around."

"We ought to build a cairn," announced Charlotte. "That's the proper thing on a mountain top. Every one must put on a stone."

"Let's each scratch our initials on our stone," suggested June, producing his pocket knife.

By the time the cairn was completed, it was nearly three, so the picnic party drank once more from the little spring in the ledges — a curious little spring to be found so high in the world — and prepared for the descent.

"Why not go down through the woods?" suggested Hope. "It will be so much cooler, and I should think we would come out on the road where it curves around the mountain in the other direction."

"Let's!" agreed Anstice. "That would be fun, and it was so hot getting up here."

"I suppose we can," said June, but Max was silent and Charlotte appeared doubtful.

"Isn't it likely to be very rough walking?" she asked.

"It doesn't look so at the start," replied June, "and all we have to do is just to keep going down. What do you say, Max?"

"I think it would be wiser to go back the way we came."

Max had scarcely spoken when Hope sprang up and

dashed quickly into the woods. "We'll go this way! Come on, it will be great fun!"

Anstice and June followed, but Charlotte hesitated, looking troubled.

"I suppose we'd better keep together, and they've chosen this way," said Max, whose color had risen at Hope's snub.

For some distance the descent through the woods was open and not at all obstructed by rocks or fallen timber, but before long they came to a ledge and those in the lead made a detour. Charlotte and Max were still behind, for they had not started with such energy, and Charlotte had stopped once to look at some beautiful moss, and Max to gather mushrooms.

"June!" he called as the others turned to the right. "Don't you think we should work to the left here?"

"We'll get over that way as soon as it is clearer tramping," came June's voice already some distance ahead.

"Nan! Hope!" called Charlotte. "Please wait! I can't come so fast, and you're almost out of sight now."

The younger girls did not hear, for the crackling twigs through which they were making their way rendered Charlotte's call inaudible. At the same moment her heavy braid of hair became tangled in a dead branch.

Charlotte stopped in annoyance, her effort to release

herself only resulting in a worse snarl. Max came to the rescue, but by the time the braid was disentangled, the others were completely out of sight.

Max shouted, but there was no reply, and only an occasional crash showed that they were still bearing to the right.

"It's mean of them not to wait! Nan knows I can't go as fast as she can!" exclaimed Charlotte impatiently, when a louder call from Max remained unanswered.

"I wish they wouldn't go over that way so far," replied her companion in some concern. He had a keen sense of direction and being used to finding his way in unfamiliar places, realized that the route on which the others had started was likely to bring them down on the farther side of Baldface.

To try to overtake them was useless, and Charlotte suddenly slackened her pace. Much companionship with her mother had taught her to recognize fatigue when she saw it, and Max looked very tired.

"We can't come up with them, so let's go as slowly as we choose. Oh, see all these wintergreen berries! I must pick some."

Charlotte's stratagem succeeded. Max picked berries, but only those he could reach from a sitting position, and when they started again it was at a more moderate pace.

They kept as far as possible to the left, but ledges

forced them from their direct way and occasional impassable thickets caused further deviation.

"I wish we'd had sense enough to go back the way we came," said Charlotte, stopping for her fourth rest. "And I believe it is going to rain. The sun is gone and it has grown so dark."

"That certainly is thunder," replied Max as a dull reverberation was echoed from the hills. "Perhaps it won't rain much, and these evergreens are thick enough to make quite respectable umbrellas."

Charlotte emptied the twigs and other débris from her shoes, and gave an anxious glance at the lead-colored sky above the trees. How quickly the storm had come up! There had been only a few small thunderheads when they left the mountain top.

Another ten minutes of struggling through underbrush brought them to a clearing where the smaller growth of timber had been cut, and only large maples and a few pines left standing.

The rain was coming in earnest; sharp, hard drops that grew faster and thicker and pattered among the leaves like small shot. Max caught sight of a little house just across an intervening field. It was a poor, forlorn dwelling, with rags stuffed in a broken window, and a general air of untidiness and discouragement. Still, it would be a shelter against the coming storm, and as they emerged from the woods, he seized Charlotte by the hand.

"Let's run! We shall not get so wet and once there we'll be under cover."

Charlotte ran, and they pelted across the field to the cottage. They were scarcely two yards from the open kitchen door when it was suddenly closed in their very faces!

CHAPTER V

THE MYSTERIOUS COTTAGE

"WELL, I like that!" exclaimed Max with an indignant thump on the inhospitable barrier, while Charlotte, breathless and panting, stopped in amazement.

There was no response to Max's knock, only a bolt grated as it was slipped from within. Max muttered something unintelligible to his companion and turned away.

"At least we can go under the woodshed if they won't let us into the house. I never met anything to equal this!"

The open shed was small, attached on one side to the house, with a connecting door, and as the two sought its refuge, the key of this door was turned in the lock.

"Aren't they impolite!" exclaimed Charlotte. "I wouldn't go in now if they asked me to!"

Max was puzzled and indignant but he was also hot and extremely tired. "It is queer!" he replied. "However, judging from its looks, we are just as comfortable here as we should be in the house."

Charlotte found a seat on a log, and Max, after a glance around, turned over an empty box and sat looking into the storm.

The rain was pouring in torrents; they had not been a moment too soon in reaching shelter. The top of Baldface was concealed by clouds and all the way up its sides the trees were bending before the wind, while at intervals, white sheets of water dashed in gusts that cut off farther vision than the nearest grove.

"I do so hope the others aren't out in this," said Charlotte when a lull made speech possible.

"I'm sure they are not. They were going down faster than we and must have reached the bottom before us. It was good of you not to hurry me."

Max turned with a pleasant smile as he spoke.

"I didn't want to hurry, either," replied Charlotte bluntly. "You've been ill, and it was hard walking for any one."

"I suppose I shouldn't have gone, but it's so long since I've been able to do much of anything, and it's beastly hard to be patient — whew! that must have struck near by!"

Charlotte had started at the blinding flash and the instantaneous thunder clap that accompanied it. Further conversation was impossible, for the lull in the storm was followed by a perfect downpour and the wind was carrying the rain past the open shed in an almost solid sheet.

For some time Max's attention was concentrated on the storm, but as the moments passed, he had a curious and slowly-growing impression that he and Charlotte were not alone. Some subconscious sense warned him of another presence.

Charlotte had resumed her seat on the split log facing the open side of the shed. She had taken off her tall-crowned Mexican hat and the dampness caused a crowd of little curly ringlets to come into existence all over her rumpled hair. Her brown eyes were looking into the fast-falling rain, and her wet tan shoes and splashed blue skirt had collected considerable sawdust from the woodshed floor, while her sweater was decorated with numerous small twigs gathered in the hasty descent of Baldface.

Max gave Charlotte only a casual glance as he turned and looked carefully into the corners of the shed. It was piled high with sawed wood, old tools, and empty boxes. The only clear space was where they were sitting. Certainly no one was there and yet Max had a strong impression to the contrary. He cast an uneasy glance into the storm.

"It is surely growing lighter," said Charlotte, "and not raining quite so fast. I counted six between the last flash of lightning and the thunder that followed, so the storm is passing farther off."

"Yes, it is only a shower," replied Max, but as he spoke, he lifted his eyes above the range of the shed

walls. High in the slope where it joined the house was a small window, and from that window, dusty and cobwebbed as it was, a face was watching them.

Max glanced quickly at the unconscious Charlotte, who with elbow on her knee, was propping her chin in her hand and watching the rain on the chips outside. Then he looked steadily into the eyes behind the pane.

The face seemed to be that of an old man, for it was framed in dingy white hair, and a soiled gray beard covered its mouth and chin, but the eyes were black, brilliant, and almost weird in the intensity of their gaze.

Max was courageous by nature, and experience had made him self-reliant, yet this discovery coming after their inhospitable reception struck him as peculiar, and the fixed gaze of those unwavering, bead-like eyes seemed little short of uncanny.

Charlotte looked up the next moment, for he suddenly left the box in the shed door and perched upon a pile of wood a trifle higher than her log and slightly behind it.

"The rain is blowing in," he remarked. "See, the clouds are lifting on Baldface."

In his changed seat, Max was between Charlotte and the window and had a better view of the face behind it. To his surprise, at his next glance, the man made unmistakable gestures that he should not at-

FROM THAT WINDOW A FACE WAS WATCHING THEM.—*Page 82.*

tract Charlotte's attention. The next time he looked, the window was blank, save for its dust and cobwebs, nor did he see the face again during the further twenty minutes they were kept prisoners by the shower.

When it once began to clear, it cleared quickly. Blue sky appeared almost before the rain stopped; the hills ceased to echo the thunder; long lines of light came athwart streaks of rain, and almost in an instant the sun shone. Baldface remained dark and gloomy, silhouetted against the light, for the sun was well down in the west.

Through the meadow wandered a path that probably led to the road. At any rate it seemed the next stage on their downward progress.

"We are in for a soaking now!" said Charlotte. "Everything is dripping wet."

Max was behind her, and she did not notice that he turned and looked searchingly at the front of the cottage. The tall grass grew up to and around the doorstep; there was no walk leading to it; and on the step itself, leaning against the front door, was a peculiar object that appeared to be a stone slab. Max noticed it with some curiosity, but he had really turned for a glance at the windows. Yes, in one of them, apparently lifted just above the sill, was that same face!

It was with relief that Max saw the cottage vanish

as they followed the indistinct path. He had an idea that he and Charlotte had narrowly escaped an adventure. Had he been alone, it might have been interesting, but in Charlotte's company, and tired as he felt, he was glad nothing more had happened.

The path ended in a muddy country road bordered by meadows and a rolling hill. Charlotte promptly turned to the right.

"Oh, please!" said Max. "Let's go the other way! We don't want to walk all around Baldface."

Charlotte faced about questioningly.

"I am sure we should go to the left," he added. "You remember the relative position of Baldface and the lake — really, I know we should take this direction."

Charlotte was doubtful, but Max's tone was half-playful, half-convincing. He seemed level-headed, and he was just as likely to be correct. She turned cheerfully.

"I'm not much good at this sort of thing so I'll go where you say. How far do you suppose it is?"

"Probably not more than a mile or two, and it looks as if it was down hill most of the way. If I am not mistaken, this is the road I drove over when I came. I don't believe it is so very far."

His tone reassured Charlotte. She was tired and footsore, but if Max, who was still more weary, could be cheerful over the prospect of two miles of sodden

road and damp bushes, she would accept the situation with equal calm.

They had not gone many rods when there was a rattling of wheels from behind, and a muddy old democrat drawn by a shaggy, fat, black horse overtook them. The driver was an elderly man with gray hair and whiskers and his soft hat shaded a pair of kindly, shrewd eyes. As he came abreast of them he drew rein.

"Don't you find it pretty dirty walking? I'm going down to the Corners and there's plenty of room if you want to ride."

"Oh, thank you!" said Max, lifting his cap. "We have had about all the walking we care for just now; we've come down Baldface."

"Baldface, eh?" inquired the man, reaching a toil-worn hand to help Charlotte. "Oh, there's room for you too, young fellow; the seat's fairly wide, and if the young lady doesn't mind being crowded a bit — there we are; get along, Rapid!"

"What a curious name for a horse!" said Charlotte.

"So it is!" agreed the man with a twinkle in his eye. "We call him that because he's so slow!"

Max laughed, a merry, boyish laugh, and the farmer looked at him with interest.

"From the city, aren't you? Now, might you be Mr. Ralston's son?"

"No, I'm his nephew. My name is Hamilton. Did you see anything up the road of the rest of our party, two girls and another boy? Coming through the woods, we got separated."

The farmer shook his head. "No, I didn't see them. How came you to try the wood slope of Baldface? The pasture side is plain and easy going."

"It wasn't very wise," replied Max, "but we went up the cleared side, and it's sport to come down a different way, you know."

"It's nice of him to say that," thought Charlotte, "when it is all Hope's fault that we did it."

"It's mighty rough walking on this slope," observed their new acquaintance. "You're lucky not to have come to harm, for there's dangerous ledges in the woods. If the rest of your young people bore off to the right, they likely came down clean the other side of the mountain."

"How far is that?" asked Charlotte anxiously.

"It's a good long walk now, surely six miles if they go around by the Corners and about the same this way. But likely they'll get a lift from somebody. You don't seem to be so very wet," he continued, "only your shoes; were you under cover when the shower broke?"

Max saw a chance to learn about the mysterious cottage. He was not as surprised as Charlotte, when the man, after hearing where they took refuge, sud-

denly pushed back his hat and uttered an exclamation.

"I want to know! And you stumbled on Pete Lemon's place! Jehosaphat, what a joke!"

Their new friend went into a spasm of silent laughter that shook his whole frame. It was some seconds before he finally pulled himself together.

"Pete's a queer cuss, but he isn't bad-hearted. The reason he slammed the door is that he hasn't spoken to a woman for nigh upon thirty years, much less let one into his house."

"Is he crazy?" demanded Charlotte in horror.

"No, Pete isn't what you'd call plain crazy, except on that one point. I don't know; it's a queer story and they tell all sorts of yarns about it, but it's a sure fact that he avoids a woman as if she was the evil one himself. He wouldn't mind the young lady's being under the shed, but I guess it's just as well you didn't step into the house before he knew it."

Max, with the recollection of those uncanny eyes before him, mentally agreed with the speaker.

"What is the story? Why does he hate women, Mr. —?"

"My name's Smith, plain John Smith. You may have heard it before. Why, I don't know as I am sure of all the ins and outs of the business, but when Pete came here some thirty years ago, he had a pretty young wife. Pete was a French-Canadian and he'd

drifted down this way working on the rivers rafting lumber. He was a well set-up young fellow, a hard worker, and everybody liked him. He'd married a girl who was pure French and she was lively and as pretty as a picture and just as capable as a girl could be. Seems like there wasn't anything she couldn't turn her hand to. Pete worked hard and was a good provider, and they were real happy together. They laid money by, and after a while they bought that house.

"By and by the baby came, a little girl, and Pete was that proud of it! They were Catholics, both Pete and Kitty, and they took the little thing clear to Bangor to get it baptized.

"Nobody ever knew just what happened, but one stormy night in October, Ed Mason, who lived in that brown house we passed up yonder, was waked by a knocking and pounding at the door and there was Kitty and the baby. They let her in and she cried and took on, but nobody, not even any of the women folks, could get out of her what was the matter. The next day she made Ed drive her to Rockland — that was the nearest railroad then — and she bought a ticket for Montreal.

"That was all we ever knew about her except that a long time after, Liza Peabody was visiting up north and she heard that Kitty Lemon and the baby had gone to France. They never came back, and from that

day to this, Pete Lemon has never spoken to a woman nor a child, and no woman has ever set foot in his house. I wouldn't advise any woman to take chances trying it, either! Annie Beach, she up and spoke to him once. Annie always was a daring piece! He looked at her as if he'd kill her in another second, and Annie was that scared they had to get a doctor to soothe her down.

"Pete did one thing that made people think he was loony. He had a gravestone made, a regular slab such as you see in the cemetery, with Kitty's and the baby's names cut on it, and then the word 'Died' and the date she went away.

"When it was ready, Pete took it home and leaned it up against his front door and there it's been, summer and winter, rain and shine, for these thirty years. Nobody's been in or out the door, and the stone's never been moved."

"The poor man!" exclaimed the sympathetic Charlotte. "For thirty years! Just think of being unhappy all that time!"

"It does seem hard," agreed Mr. Smith. "The neighbors at first tried to do for Pete and help him, but he got more and more unsociable and unwilling to see folks. He raises vegetables and garden sass, and once in a while he gets down to the store and trades for a little tobacco."

"Then he will talk to men?" Max asked quickly.

"Pete isn't what you'd call free with his tongue at any time, but he'll most usually give a civil answer to a civil question. It seems queer you young folks should have stumbled on that one house. There isn't another in the township but would be glad to give you shelter."

"I'm thankful we didn't see him," said Charlotte. "I should have been frightened."

"I wonder whether he knows anything about his family," observed Max, who had been for a moment in a deep study.

"Nobody can tell you that. I did hear that once there was an artist down at the Corners who'd been in France, and Pete went to see him. Of course, folks had it right off that he'd been asking for Kitty and the baby."

"What did you say his name was,— Lemon?"

"Yes, that's it. They say it's really French, Lemorne or something like that, but we call it Lemon."

"Lemoine, probably," said Max thoughtfully. The name woke a curious little sense of familiarity in his mind. Where had he heard it before and what association had it for him?

"Well, I turn off here," announced Mr. Smith, drawing up Rapid, whose leisurely gait had finally brought them to the cross-roads. "You haven't more than a ten-minute walk now. If you're ever up our way, drop in; we'll be pleased to see you."

Charlotte and Max thanked him heartily and started on their brief walk with renewed spirits. They had met for the second time that morning, but now it seemed as if they must always have known each other.

Just as they reached the Tylers' gate, Mrs. Ralston and Molly came down the steps and Mrs. Walker was sitting on the broad piazza. After the necessary explanations, Max and his aunt turned homeward.

"I hope the others won't be long in coming. Max, my dear boy, you are as tired as can be! I ought not to have let you go! Has it done you any harm?"

"No, indeed! I'll be quite fit in the morning, Auntie."

"You shall have some supper and go directly to bed. I'm surprised that June did not know better than to try to come down through the woods."

Mrs. Ralston was looking anxiously at her nephew, but Max smiled and changed the subject.

"You should have seen us falling down that mountain! I haven't had time to be amused by it before, but it is comical to think of the way we were plunging down in different directions! Did you speak of supper, Auntie? I would like some, but I protest against being sent to bed! Let me stay in the hammock and talk with you until the others come."

It was seven before June and the two girls appeared, muddy, wet and tired. As Mr. Smith thought, they

had come down on the opposite side of the mountain in perfectly unfamiliar country. A friendly barn protected them during the shower, but there had been the long walk home on the rain-soaked roads where they had not been fortunate enough to get a lift.

"You seem to have had a nice time in spite of everything," said Mrs. Ralston when they also had eaten and told their adventures. "But, June, it really wasn't very sensible to try that side of the mountain."

"I know it, Mother," June began in his placid way, but Hope suddenly interrupted.

"It was altogether too tame and mollycoddlish to go down the easy way we went up! I can't bear to be so proper and priggish! Mother, I'm tired to death, and I'm going to bed!"

June looked surprised at his sister's outburst, but he did not connect it with the flush that crossed his cousin's face, nor the quiet manner in which he presently said good-night.

Max did not light the candle after reaching his room, but stood for some moments by the window, looking soberly at the elms outlined in black against a starry sky. Hope's evident antagonism puzzled him, for he was quite unconscious of having given her any cause for offence. Only that morning when he asked the name of a bird, new to him, though familiar to all the rest, Hope made a scornful side remark to Anstice about his not knowing much, though he had

been brought up in Europe. Her cousin overheard, but if Hope had expected to provoke a retort, she was disappointed. The quiet dignity with which Max ignored her rudeness, was due to no lack of spirit, but to the fact that though he had never enjoyed the privilege of living in the land of the Stars and Stripes, he had been rather carefully trained in the duty of being polite and considerate.

Max was hurt as well as puzzled by her aloofness, for people usually liked him. This experience was both new and trying. Looking at the stars, he thought things over, and then, whistling softly, went to bed in an unruffled frame of mind. After all, what did it matter if Hope was disagreeable? Aunt Helen was kindness itself; June was a chum worth having; and Molly was a duck. Summer would soon pass and an agreement with Dad existed concerning next year.

CHAPTER VI

ONE SUNDAY

"LOOK here, June, how does a fellow get his boots cleaned?" Max asked on his first Sunday morning in Maine.

June looked up in amusement. "Boots cleaned?" he inquired, casting a glance at his cousin's russet Oxfords. "What do you mean?"

"These aren't fit for church," Max explained. "I want them cleaned, rubbed up, polished, don't you know?"

"No, I didn't know!" replied his cousin, grinning from ear to ear. "Well, I suppose on a pinch, you can get Mr. Tyler to yoke his oxen and take you into town. There is a boot-blacking place there. Being Sunday, though, it may be closed."

Max looked so genuinely puzzled that good-natured June relented.

"Polish them yourself, old chap! That's the way we do in democratic America."

"Haven't you ever polished your own boots?" Hope inquired with scornful incredulity.

"No, I never have," Max retorted, flushing a lit-

tle at her tone. "But it doesn't follow that I can't. I'll have a try, anyway. Got any gum, June, or whatever you do it with?"

"Gum!" sniffed Hope. "How do people who live in Europe get their boots blacked?"

"The servants do them," Max answered.

"But does everybody have menservants?" asked June. "You couldn't ask a woman to black your boots."

"I fancy the maids do them sometimes," said his cousin, looking a little uncomfortable. "I say, June, trot out your stuff. If the constitution of the United States confers upon me the privilege of cleaning my own boots, I don't want to be kept out of my birthright a minute longer!"

June laughed and liked his cousin all the better for this quick acceptance of the situation, but Hope's pride was up in arms at what she considered a direct reflection upon their present servantless household.

"Don't you ever do anything for yourself?" she demanded.

"Oh, rather!" said Max gravely. "I generally manage to clean my own teeth."

Hope walked into the house in disdain and June chuckled.

"Score for you!" he observed, as he watched with approval his cousin's energetic operations. Max began by carefully reading the directions printed on the

box of polish and was achieving commendable results.

"Hardly fair to score off a girl," he remarked, thoughtfully surveying his handiwork.

"Honestly, now, haven't you ever polished your boots before?" June asked curiously.

Max shook his head. "It's different over there," he replied after a pause. "It's no good mixing things, June. There are so many more servants, and there are classes of people, you know. The servants wouldn't think you a gentleman if you did such things for yourself."

"Does it make you less of one?"

"No, of course not," said Max slowly. "It's just different. Dad says a gentleman adapts himself to circumstances. When I'm in Rome, I do as the Romans do. Now I'm here, I shall endeavor to follow the customs and conventions of the country as expounded to me by my cousin George."

"Max, you're a sport!" said June warmly. "Yes, Mother, we're almost ready."

Hope, Mrs. Ralston and Molly started ahead along the pasture path that made so pleasant a walk to the country meeting-house.

"It's a fierce waste of time to go to church on such a day," observed June as the boys followed. "I wouldn't go if Mother didn't want us to. Don't you hate to take the time?"

Max, in his turn, looked surprised. He had been brought up in the Church of England and trained to systematic attendance.

"I usually go to service," he responded after an instant. "Why are they stopping? Forgotten something, Auntie?" he asked, hastening his steps in order to overtake the others.

"I meant to bring paper and pencil for Molly to occupy herself with during the sermon," said Mrs. Ralston. "I left them on the porch table."

"I'll run back and fetch them," Max volunteered quickly, and he was gone before June could start.

The others sauntered slowly on, and after delaying for some friendly greetings among the neighbors gathering on the steps of the church, went in and seated themselves. The bell was clanging its last warning.

"Max will easily find us," Mrs. Ralston remarked to her son and daughter. "We will leave the end seat for him."

June chose to sit beside his mother, thus leaving Hope nearest the end of the pew. The meeting-house was quite well filled before Max came quickly down the aisle. He took the seat left for him, gave his aunt the pencil and paper, and to Hope's surprise and consternation, immediately knelt most reverently and devoutly.

Hope's cheeks were flaming. With a young girl's

dislike of being made conspicuous, she resented intensely the interested eyes turned upon Max from all sides of the church. No one else in the congregation had knelt and Hope herself was wholly unfamiliar with a service requiring it. She gave a quick, distressed glance at her mother, but Mrs. Ralston seemed quite unconscious of anything unusual. Presently Max rose, drew a small book from his coat pocket, and glanced to the front of the church. Apparently he failed to find something he expected to see, for after a second he looked around in a puzzled manner, picked up a battered volume marked "Hymns for Young and Old," replaced it, looked again at the high wooden pulpit flanked by a red plush sofa and two arm-chairs, gazed thoughtfully at the man in a black Sunday suit who had now taken his place on the sofa, and then, stuffing his little book into his pocket, leaned back with an air of detached and alert observation.

Hope's cheeks were still crimson as they rose and remained standing during a prayer, but her cousin did nothing more that was unusual. He had grasped the fact that the form of worship was not the one to which he was accustomed, and instantly adapted himself to it. But during the sermon, Hope caught his eyes fixed with a kind of speculative wonder upon a fearful imitation stained-glass window, upon the sill of which stood a kerosene lamp with drowned flies floating in

its odoriferous interior. That especial country church was nothing to Hope, and in fact, she had herself felt inclined to poke fun at its glaring deficiencies, but unreasonably enough, she resented a shadow of criticism from her cousin. Her annoyance flamed up afresh when after the benediction Max evidently saved himself just in the nick of time from again going down on his knees. Hope could hardly wait for a chance to speak to her mother in private.

"Mamma, wasn't that dreadful?" she burst out, following Mrs. Ralston into her room. "I never was so mortified in all my life! I do think Max might not have done that!"

"Why, Hope!" said her mother in surprise. "Max did nothing out of the way. If I had stopped to think, I would have known that he must be accustomed to a ritualistic service. It was perfectly natural for him to kneel. Charlotte and Anstice also knelt when they came in."

Hope, in her embarrassment, had not noticed that fact. For a moment, it silenced her.

"Max's doing it made us very conspicuous," she finally declared.

"I don't agree with you, Hope. I thought Max was extremely quick to realize the different form of worship. Probably he did not care for the simpler service of our church, but he certainly joined in it with dignity and reverence."

Hope said nothing more, but still another incident occurred that afternoon to upset her equanimity. She had made an engagement to bathe in the lake with the girls and unintentionally wet her heavy hair. To hasten its drying she shook loose its tawny glory. It was soon ready to rebraid, but Hope was interested in a story and delayed until the boys came back from a tramp. Seeing her on the porch, Max suddenly stopped short.

"Oh, Hope," he exclaimed, "how wonderful your hair is! It's like my mother's. I used to play with hers when I was a kiddie. Will you let me touch it just a minute?"

"No, of course not!" Hope snapped.

Max looked as though the screen door she slammed behind her had actually struck him in the face. June stood in uncomfortable silence, not knowing how to deal with this situation. Even across his unimaginative mind flashed a realization of that dead young mother and the child who had loved her beautiful hair.

The next moment Max turned on his heel. "Let's go on the lake," he suggested, though not in quite his usual manner. "It looks as if there might be a dandy sunset."

In her own room Hope resentfully combed her hair. She knew it was like Aunt Edith's; her mother had

often told her so, but that was no reason Max should have the impertinence to ask to touch it.

"Max is too queer for anything!" she thought angrily. "I just can't stand his English ways. I can't endure the way he calls a pitcher a 'jug' and says 'taffy' for candy, and the way he drawls 'Rather' or 'I should say!' when he's asked a question. He calls 'Look sharp!' when he wants any one to hurry, and *nobody* understands the slang he uses! I can't see why June thinks it *funny*. It *isn't!* I never know what Max means, and then he grins. I can't, for the life of me, see why people find his odd ways of saying and doing things so attractive. Even Mother thinks them charming. But *I* think they're just plain queer!"

CHAPTER VII

THE OPEN ROAD

JUNE sat on the boathouse steps, whistling softly as he surveyed the shining lake. The radiant morning seemed borrowed from early September, so fresh and clear was its air, so entrancingly clean-cut its sunlight and shadow. The birds alone belonged to midsummer. Upon them the cares of life were pressing; they lacked their spring joyousness or the freedom that comes with autumn.

"June," said his cousin's voice from behind, "this is a day when one feels like stepping only on high places. A *wanderlust* seizes upon me. Let us 'go, go away from here!'"

"Where shall we go?" June grinned, but falling in with his cousin's gay mood.

"More fun to go with no plan at all," Max returned. "Let's leave it to the 'spirit in our feet,'" he added whimsically.

"My toes haven't got that germ!" June retorted dryly. "I wish we had a motor-car!"

Max silently echoed the wish. To sit at the wheel of a fast car and strike a straight line for the distant

horizon would exactly have fitted his present frame of mind. Were he in Rome, he could order out Dad's motor and betake himself to the wide campagna. Probably Dad wouldn't let him go without the chauffeur, but what of that? Here, one didn't have for the mere desiring, a car, either with or without a chauffeur, or even the saddle-horse that also was at his disposal in Italy. Life on this side of the Atlantic was different in some respects, even to one who was accustomed to vacations of an unusual order.

Max suppressed a sigh. After all, tramping wasn't half bad and one could always tramp. And if they stuck to fairly level ground, probably he wouldn't get so confoundedly fagged as he had on Baldface.

"Let's start," he suggested. "We'll tell Auntie not to expect us until she sees us."

"Lunch?" queried June.

"No lunch," Max decreed. "A true adventurer fares forth with empty pockets."

"And probably gets an empty stomach as well," said his cousin. "But there are always berries and apples. You're it, so what you say goes. Let's take Hope, for the other girls have company and she'll be alone. Polly Anne!" he shouted, catching sight of his sister's sailor blouse in the distance.

Max made no spoken remonstrance, but his expression changed. He was sensitively aware of Hope's critical attitude, and being no saint, only a very human

boy, was beginning to resent it. But perhaps Hope wouldn't care to go.

Hope, however, also felt the charm of the morning and agreed pleasantly to the plan suggested.

"Expect us when we appear, Mother!" June announced. "We may be home for dinner and we may seek our fortunes. 'It may be a day and it may be forever!'"

"I hope not!" his mother responded, smiling. "Good-by and a pleasant walk."

The three started, each happy in a different way: June because he loved all active exercise; Hope because her brother wanted her, and Max because he felt the joy of the morning and the call of the open road.

"June," he inquired mischievously, "do you ever write poetry?"

"I'm not such a fool. Do you?"

Max laughed. "If I did, do you think I'd acknowledge it now?" he inquired, quite unconscious of the sudden glance Hope gave him. "Look here, let's leave the road and go over this hill. See those stunning pines on the sky-line."

"Oh, wait!" Hope exclaimed. "Isn't that the dearest kitten?"

"A yellow coon kitten," said June, looking at the fuzzy ball by the farmhouse gate. "It looks like a tiny lion."

"'A little lion, small and dainty sweet,—
For such there be,—
With sea-gray eyes and softly stepping feet,
She prayed of me—'"

Max murmured, apparently to himself.

"Did you write *that?*" June demanded with a chuckle. "'Fess up!"

"Not I!" Max denied, coloring under the teasing tone. He had not intended either cousin to overhear.

Hope petted the kitten thoughtfully, her attention still held by the fascinating and unfamiliar lines.

"Who did write it?" she asked at length, though reluctant to express any interest.

"An old chap who lived some centuries B. C.," Max replied. "I forget his name. Indeed, I'm not certain any one ever knew it."

"What are you giving us now?" June inquired cheerfully.

"Fact. It's a translation from an old Greek poem."

"If you didn't write it, did you translate it?" his cousin demanded as Hope put the kitten down and they started again on their walk.

"Not on your life! I don't translate Greek unless they make me. Connie found it somewhere in English. She's perfectly dippy over poetry so she made me read it, too. The chap who speaks is telling how a girl named Arsinöe wanted him to go to Egypt and

get her a 'little lion.' He wouldn't, so she turned him down for the other fellow, 'far-traveled Nicias' who 'wooed and won her with gift of furry creatures from oversea.' And you know, I think it *was* a pretty cheeky thing to ask him to go to Egypt just for a cat!"

Hope asked no further questions and made no comment, but obstinately refused to admit to her mind the slightest suggestion that she and her cousin might possess some tastes in common.

Their ramble led them over the hill Max wished to mount, around a small lake, through several pastures, down a steep ledge and into a wood where a shallow brook gurgled over scattered stones. In crossing, Hope slipped from a stone and was wet to her knees, a mishap to which neither she nor June gave a second thought. The matter-of-fact manner in which June reached a hand to help her out of the precarious position and the calm with which Hope ignored her soaked feet and merely wrung the water from her skirts, rather aroused Max's admiration.

Twelve o'clock found them in a beautiful grove of pines, miles from home.

"Time to eat!" June announced. "Max, where's your promised food? Trot out your tame ravens!"

"We were crazy to come without lunch!" Hope grumbled, realizing that she was tired and extremely hungry. "We'll be starved before we can get home.

And I hope one of you knows the way back, for I don't!"

"I thought we'd strike a village where we could buy bread and cheese," said Max. "But there's a house, and a nice, tidy little place it looks! We'll step up and see what's on for dinner."

Hope stared at him in horror. "Max, you can't!" she exclaimed. "They'd be insulted!"

"Why?" her cousin inquired. "When Dad and I are tramping, we stop anywhere and get things from the peasants. Often it's only bread, but they are always glad to let us have it."

Hope's cheeks flamed. "These people aren't peasants!" she snapped.

"I know they aren't," Max replied, "and that's why I'm expecting more of a dinner!"

"But you mustn't *ask* them!" insisted Hope, stopping in dismay. "June, do tell him he can't!"

June would not interfere. He, too, was hungry, and moreover had an amused conviction that his cousin would succeed where another might fail.

"I never did it," he admitted, "but what's the harm in asking? They can only refuse."

"I'm no beggar!" Hope retorted.

A flash came into Max's eyes. He deliberately surveyed his own person, looked the other two over from head to foot and shrugged his shoulders, a gesture condemned by Hope as exasperatingly "queer."

"I *had* a slight intention of paying for what we ate," he remarked gently to the distant horizon.

"There's no harm in trying it, Sis," observed June. "I'm hungry enough to eat a hedgehog. Go ahead, Max; I'll hold your hat. But don't be disappointed if they turn you down."

Hope choked back another remonstrance and reluctantly followed the boys. Max opened the side gate of the little cottage, disclosing a brick walk that led to a vine-shaded porch. Beds of flowers bordered the path, for the most part, old-fashioned posies; hollyhock, gillyflower and balsam, but just by the doorstep stood a magnificent clump of golden iris, a truly regal display. Admiring it, Max forgot his errand and his proximity to the house.

"O bright yellow angel!" he suddenly exclaimed, his hands dramatically clasped as he struck an absurd attitude.

"For the land's sake!" came a voice from the shaded porch. "Is the boy crazy?"

Max gasped and stepped backward, colliding with his cousin, who snorted convulsively and in his turn, stood on Hope's toes. The whole group retreated a pace in disorder.

"What's that you said?" asked the same voice as a thin, meager woman rose from a rocker behind the vines.

"Ah, pardon, Madame!" said Max, in his excite-

ment, giving the words their French pronunciation. "I merely spoke to the flowers!"

"So I thought!" retorted the woman quickly. "I didn't think you meant me!"

June chuckled outright and Max stared in dismay, quite disconcerted by this comment.

"Well, what did you want?" she went on. "Come up out of the sun. How the young folks can run around without their hats beats me, but they all do it. Seems to be a sign of age when you have to cover your head. Did you want some water to drink?"

"We wanted more than that," Max replied persuasively. "We've tramped the whole morning, came over from Bexford. We started just for fun and there hasn't been any village. I thought perhaps you'd let us buy some bread and milk, whatever you happen to have, because we're rather keen,— er, hungry!"

"I should say you were!" commented the woman. "Something must be the matter with a boy who calls a lily a bright yellow angel! 'Tisn't natural! I can't give you much," she added, looking at him with a pair of twinkling eyes, "because I haven't much in the house. But if bread and butter and some eggs will do for your dinner,— just what I was going in this minute to get for myself,— why you can have it and welcome!"

"Even less will do me!" declared Max, glancing at his cousins.

"That sounds mighty good!" June grinned, and Hope, though she made no comment, looked less forbidding.

"Sit down on the porch then," directed the woman, "or no, maybe it's cooler in the sitting-room. Just come in," she added, opening the screen door and looking a little curiously at the way both boys stood aside for her and Hope to enter.

The low-ceiled room into which they were ushered was dark and would have been stuffy save for the fragrant breath admitted by the open windows from the garden below. Hope, tired with her long walk, sank into a plush-covered rocking chair; June's attention was caught by two atrocious crayon portraits evidently enlarged from photographs poor in themselves. After giving them grave consideration, he shook his head solemnly and sat down to peruse the "Ladies' Home Journal," apparently the sole literature afforded by the house.

Max, having surveyed the ugly room at a glance, turned to the one object in it that seemed to appeal to him, an old square piano. Hope looked on disapprovingly as he opened it. No music was in evidence, except a battered hymn book, but Max did not need a printed score. Sitting down, he ran his fingers tentatively over the keys, finding to his surprise that

the instrument was in fairly good tune. As he struck experimental chords along the length of the keyboard, the pale face of their hostess appeared in the doorway.

"Do you object to my playing?" Max instantly asked.

"I'd like nothing better than to hear you," was the prompt reply. "Music is always a treat to me. You see I can't play myself," she added cheerfully, holding out her left hand. "I fell on the ice half a dozen winters ago, and broke my wrist. The doctor didn't set it right and it's been stiff ever since. I can manage to get my housework done up, but that's all. Sometimes Florrie Smith, who lives down the road a piece, comes in and gives me a tune. But I never saw a boy who could play the piano before."

Max smiled. The chords he had been idly striking changed into the glorious processional of Wagner's pilgrims, strange music indeed in that country parlor. It held spellbound the listener in the doorway. Not until the last note died away did she turn and vanish with a sudden exclamation.

"I didn't know you could pound the ivories like that, Max," June observed. "Why didn't you tell us you were an infant prodigy?"

"Because I'm not!" declared his cousin cheerfully. "You should hear my chum Louis play. Nobody wants to hear Max when Lou is around."

Hope was silent. She knew enough about music to realize that her cousin was not only playing well, but playing because he loved it.

"Have you taken lessons a long time?" she inquired abruptly.

"I've had only a few lessons on the piano. I was taught the violin when I was a kiddie. This I've really picked up from hearing Louis. He's a wonder."

Max spoke very simply and naturally, but Hope, hungry and tired, instantly attributed his modesty to conceit. "He knows he plays well!" she thought, "and he's fishing for compliments."

"Why didn't you bring your violin?" she demanded suspiciously.

"I wish I had," Max answered rather soberly. "I didn't know I should miss it so. My violin is one of the things I love best and this spring I tried to play before I was strong enough. The doctor, instead of realizing that it did me up only because I wasn't quite myself, took it into his idiotic head that the music was bad for me, so everybody figuratively sat down on my violin, and I wasn't permitted to play. If Dad had been there, he would have understood, but the others didn't. But even Dad didn't wish me to practise this summer and thought perhaps it was just as well that my violin was left in St. Helier's. I smell

those eggs!" he continued abruptly. "I hope they are plentiful for I could do with several myself."

"It's all ready!" called their hostess, "and I guess you're ready for it."

"I am!" June replied promptly. "Come, Polly Anne!"

Hope led the way into the sunny kitchen. Its red covered table was laden with bread and butter, a big pitcher of milk, doughnuts, an apple-pie, cheese and a platter of fried eggs. The china was heavy and the knives and forks battered, but both were clean, and the food looked most appetizing to the hungry trio.

"My name is Wade, Lizzie Wade," their hostess said in reply to a shy question from Hope. "I've lived here all alone ever since Father died, ten years ago, now. Yes, it is lonesome in the winter, 'specially when the snow drifts in so I can't get out to meeting. But there, you don't know, you young folks, what it is to be lonely!"

Miss Wade chatted on, sometimes asking a question, but for the most part doing the talking herself and permitting them to enjoy the welcome luncheon.

"Would a quarter be too much?" she asked doubtfully, when they had finished and were proffering payment.

Max hesitated. Still unfamiliar with the coinage of his own country, he was honestly puzzled as to

the exact value of the "quarter" mentioned. Hope, noticing the pause, misunderstood its reason.

"Well, Max *is* close-fisted!" she thought with scornful disgust.

"A quarter isn't enough, Miss Wade," said June, coming to the rescue. "I've eaten more than the worth of that myself."

"Is this a quarter?" Max inquired, balancing a coin on his finger. "That's about equal to a shilling? No, of course it isn't enough!"

Her cousin's ready acquiescence should have removed the unjust suspicion from Hope's mind, but she refused to credit him with any other motive for hesitation than that of stinginess.

"For the land's sake!" Miss Wade interrupted, "don't you know a quarter-dollar when you see one? Where *were* you raised?"

In spite of herself, even Hope smiled at the volcanic curiosity expressed by the tone of the question.

"My parents were both Americans," Max replied laughingly, understanding her meaning, though its expression was wholly unfamiliar. "I was born in Italy, and I've always lived in Europe. I came to the States Monday two weeks, to visit my cousins."

"Well, that accounts for it!" Miss Wade sighed with the air of one who has solved a hard problem. "It didn't rest easy on my mind. But it's all clear now. I've heard that Italians had queer ways of

talking, and perhaps they do believe that flowers have souls. And your playing the piano! Yes, that accounts for it all!"

Her satisfaction was so evident and so complete that they laughed again.

"But I can't take that!" she exclaimed, noticing the dollar Max had tucked under his napkin. "If you want to pay me fifty cents, you can, but I wouldn't feel honest to take that much."

"But there are three of us, Miss Wade, and the luncheon is surely worth a shilling — I mean a quarter, apiece, and it is a favor that we have it at all," Max expostulated gently.

"I couldn't take it!" Miss Wade replied with the same decision. "You can pay me the half dollar if you feel it is worth it, and perhaps," she hesitated a second, "perhaps you'll play another tune now I can sit down and give my mind to it."

"I'll play gladly, but that is only a pleasure to me," Max declared.

"I like the kind of pieces you play," their hostess observed when the palace of music built by a Beethoven sonata had vanished into silence. "Florrie only knows jiggy songs."

Max made few comments as he played for the better part of an hour, but he paid his listener the compliment of giving her good music. Not all was classical, but all was worth hearing, and musical Hope

appreciated this fact, though wild horses could not have drawn from her an expression of enjoyment. June, for the first time in his cousin's company, was bored. Florrie's "jiggy songs" would better have pleased his ear.

"Max, we ought to be going," he said at length. "We mustn't keep Mother guessing too long."

"Right, oh!" agreed Max, striking a final crashing chord. "My word!"

Before any one knew what was happening, the pianist landed on the floor with a thud, among the fragments of the collapsed stool.

"You'll permit me to pay for this at least!" he observed as he arose from the ruin.

"Land! it's only come unglued!" Miss Wade replied cheerfully. "It does that quite frequent, but I did think I'd got it stuck together for good this time. I hope you're not hurt. Only last week it sent Florrie sprawling!"

The philosophical calm with which she announced these recurrent accidents quite upset the gravity of the party. They made their farewells with merry smiles on both sides.

By the road, Bexford lay surely eight miles away, a distance increased by the detours of the early afternoon. Later, Max grew tired and more willingly kept to the road. The end of the day found both boys quite as happy as its beginning, but not Hope. At no

time had she been talkative, but with the passing hours she grew more and more silent. Though June had wanted her company, his attention proved divided, and from Hope's point of view the expedition was scarcely a success. She could not share her brother's amused enjoyment of Max's ways and words, and she dubbed as "silly" the light-hearted joyousness with which he tried to enliven the tramp. Not for an instant did she guess that Max could have been still more charming as a comrade, had she responded to his mood. Strange to say, the suspicion that her cousin might care about things she liked, books and music for instance, only intensified her determination to leave him entirely alone. June's careless remarks made that day in the boat could not so easily be forgotten.

Not far from home, Hope sat down to remove a pebble from her shoe. Engaged in this operation, she scarcely noticed an old man who passed on the other side of the road, receiving only an impression of sharp black eyes set in a face surrounded by dingy white whiskers and hair. When she again rose to her feet, June was poking a stick into a hole strongly suspected of being a woodchuck's front door, and Max stood looking after the passer-by.

Something in her cousin's attitude caught Hope's attention. In reality, he seemed arrested,— struck by some sudden thought, but Hope noticed only the con-

trast between his erect, youthful figure in a trim blue serge Norfolk suit and the bent, shabbily-dressed old man, who nevertheless showed indications of having once been strong and straight.

For a moment, Max stared after him, and then, deep in thought, joined his cousin. That man was certainly the inmate of the mysterious cottage where he and Charlotte took refuge, about whom Mr. Smith told that long and rather pathetic story. His name was Lemon, or rather, Lemoine. And what *was* the dim association with which that name persistently tantalized his memory?

CHAPTER VIII

ON THE WAY TO THE POST-OFFICE

MRS. Ralston, as she seated herself by the vine-shaded south window of the living-room, glanced with interest at the group of young people on the porch. A gentle rain was falling, just enough to prevent any outdoor sport, but Charlotte and Anstice, fortified with overshoes and umbrellas, had come up the road to spend the afternoon with Hope.

Evidently some game was just ended, for the chairs from which the girls had risen were pushed irregularly away from the folding sewing-table which had been borrowed from Mrs. Ralston's room. Max was leaning back, balancing his chair on its two rear legs while June was tipped in the opposite direction over the table, still intent upon the cards spread before him. Charlotte had taken Molly and a kitten on her lap. Rather, she had taken Molly, and Daffy, being to all purposes an undetachable piece of Molly's chubby person, had naturally come also. Anstice and Hope were on the step below, sheltered by the wide eaves from the rain, busily comparing notes on the

fancy work which received only fitful attention from either. Hope disliked to sew, and Anstice, as a rule, tired of her work before it approached completion. Charlotte usually came to the rescue, so Anstice felt free to give full scope to all her fancies, since her sister's patient fingers were almost sure to bring order out of chaos and an end to many half-finished bits of needlework.

"'And so the wee baby upon the tree-top,'"

sang Charlotte in a sweet, true voice as she cuddled Molly.

"I give that up!" said June, straightening his back and bringing his chair legs to earth again. "It's a clever trick. I see how it is done, but I don't see why it is so."

"No more do I," replied Max lazily. "It always comes out that way, but I've never been able to find the reason."

"For some time I have thought that your brains were deteriorating," observed his cousin. "The way you get up from bed and bolt straight into the lake is dangerous for any one's head. It is evidently too much for yours. And by the way, Max, Mother doesn't allow Molly to take the kittens to bed with her. This morning you had them both, one wrapped round one ear and the other across your throat! You mustn't take them again unless she says you may."

Molly looked up suspiciously, her attention caught by mention of the beloved pussies.

"It wasn't my fault they came, for you left the house door open," laughed Max. "Besides, they weren't in bed with me; they were merely applied externally. Next time they come, I shall shy them at you. The little wretch across my throat made me dream he was a *poltergeist.*"

"A which?" inquired Charlotte, breaking off in her song.

"We used to have one of those," June remarked gravely, "but we always made it sleep in the cellar."

"Oh, shut up!" exclaimed Max merrily while Charlotte repeated her query.

"I don't know exactly what it is in English," replied Max in a puzzled tone as he stopped laughing. "It's what you call an elemental; a spirit that is earth-bound."

"Max," inquired June solemnly, "have you been brought up under Christian influences?"

"I'm under the impression that I have been," grinned his cousin.

"Well, I'm glad to hear it. I was afraid you might be a heathen. Never before have I heard of elementals! Don't you dare spring anything like that on us again without fair warning! It strikes me it is time to go for the milk."

"I was just wondering which of my boys I should

send on that errand," said Mrs. Ralston, leaning from the window. "I know it usually takes both to get the milk, but to-night I wish some one would go to the Corners for the mail."

"Oh, Mamma, I'll go for the letters!" Hope exclaimed. "I can manage without getting wet and I'd like the walk. Nan will come with me, won't you, Nan?"

"I am afraid there isn't time for her to go," said Charlotte. "Everything is so wet that you'll have to go round by the road, and we have supper at six. Mrs. Tyler doesn't like us to be late."

"No, I suppose not," agreed Anstice. "She never says anything, but her back is just as stiff! She has a very expressive back."

"Then Hope and Max might go for the mail while June gets the milk," suggested Mrs. Ralston.

"Why mayn't Molly and I get the milk?" asked Max. "It isn't too far for her to walk and I'll try not to let her get wet. She hasn't had much outdoors to-day; mayn't I take her, Auntie?"

Molly sprang from Charlotte's lap with a gleeful shout and flung both arms around her cousin's neck.

"She'd love to go, Max, but I'm afraid you will find her a bother."

"Mollykins, do you hear that? Let's collect your — er — rubbers, and don't choke me! You're worse than your kitten."

The farmhouse from which the milk came was on the road beyond the Tylers' so Max and the two girls started, with Molly clinging tightly to her cousin's hand on one side and Charlotte's on the other. Their progress was somewhat impeded by her desire to swing between the hands she clasped, a process that threatened disaster to her rompers. The rain was no longer falling and faint sun rays from behind Baldface indicated a pleasant to-morrow.

The way to the postoffice was in the opposite direction. Ordinarily a short cut was possible, through woods and pastures that bridged the angle around which the road led. To-night the path was too wet to be attempted and Hope and June each took a side of the road, finding a narrow, hard margin between its muddy center and the soaking grass and bushes. June was whistling softly as he walked with hands in his pockets and his brown hair disordered by the evening breeze.

"Wasn't Max funny with his *poltergeist?*" he observed with a reminiscent chuckle.

"I didn't see anything funny," replied Hope dryly.

"Now, miss, what's the matter with you?" June demanded, casting a glance across the narrow road.

"Nothing!" answered his sister stiffly. She continually slighted Max, almost openly, but her cousin had never before shown that he noticed. His quick request for Molly as a companion seemed very marked

to Hope. Though she knew she had often been unkind, this first indication of avoidance on his part hurt her pride.

"I thought it was funny!" went on June, quite unconscious of the state of affairs. "Max is corking good company. I've never been so entertained before in all my little life. I do wish Uncle Rod would let him stay and go to school with me this winter. His being here makes the summer no end jollier."

Hope suddenly stopped short, her face flushed and her eyes filling with tears. Her brother's words seemed the last thing she could possibly bear.

"I think I'll go back. We've left Mother alone."

Hope was too innately truthful not to acknowledge to herself the falsity of this excuse as soon as it was spoken.

"Anyway, I don't want to go," she added quickly.

June faced about in some perplexity. He was too familiar with Hope's tempests not to realize that storm signals were flying.

"Oh, come along, Polly Anne! What did I say that you didn't like?"

June was unwise to ask the question, for Hope turned on him impatiently.

"It's been perfectly horrid ever since Max came! I never had such a miserable vacation before!"

A burst of tears choked further utterance, and regardless of the dampness of the stone wall, Hope

leaned upon it and hid her face. June stood looking at her undecidedly, for whatever he did was almost certain to be the wrong thing. Moreover, as he seldom lost his own temper and was not easily ruffled by trifles, he found it difficult to understand why his sister took everything so seriously.

"It's all Greek to me what you've got into your head about Max, Polly Anne!" he commented bluntly. "He started to be just as nice to you as to the rest of us. You and I've always been such chums that I can't see why you won't take him in, too, but you haven't been half-way decent sometimes. I don't wonder he feels as he does."

"Oh, if you've discussed the matter —" began Hope angrily.

"I don't discuss my sister with any boy," responded her brother with dignity. "Max has never said one word about the way you treat him. I've used my own eyes."

Hope made no reply; she was crying with her head on the wall. After a moment June came over beside her.

"Polly Anne," he said coaxingly, "do stop and come along and let's have a nice time the way we always do. It's beastly when you feel this way. Max is such a brick that I can't see why you won't be decent to him and have everything pleasant and jolly."

June paused for the response that did not come.

"You made up your mind not to like him before you ever saw him," he continued. "I think it's queer that Mother hasn't noticed how you snub him."

"You may tell her if you like," retorted Hope.

"I can't see that it would do any good," replied June, taking her words literally, "but there is one thing, Hope! When Father comes he is sure to see that something is wrong. He thinks everything of Uncle Rod and has wanted Max to come before. You'd better stop short off! There'll be no hiding it from him!"

"George Ralston, don't you speak to me again!" exploded poor Hope.

"All right!" said June abruptly. "I'm going for the mail."

The country road was absolutely deserted and very quiet save for a saucy squirrel that peered around a bough and scolded at unhappy Hope, half-sitting, half-lying on the wall under the big walnut. It was damp and hard, but in her present frame of mind, Hope welcomed its discomfort.

Presently she sat up, still absorbed with her own unpleasant thoughts and unconsciously began to strip the leaves from a near-by bush. Molly was already devoted to Max, and June had remarked how much pleasanter the summer was since he came. Poor Hope! There were few leaves left on the little tree when she finally slid from the wall and turned slowly

toward home. Her head ached and her eyes felt hot and swollen; what explanation could she give her mother?

Fortunately Mrs. Ralston was busy and did not notice her daughter's tear-stained face. Hope went to her room to bathe her eyes and witnessed the arrival of Max and Molly; the latter a sad mass of mud.

"Auntie, just look at her! I didn't mean to let her fall, but somehow she did!" Max said in laughing apology.

"Never mind, dear; she isn't hurt. I'll take her rompers and sandals off out here. I think Hope just went to her room; will you ask her for Molly's wrapper and slippers? We'll let you come to supper in a kimono; won't that be funny?" she added to Molly.

Hope made no reply to her cousin's request, but handed Molly's small garments to him and closed the door almost in his face.

"What's the matter, dear?" asked Mrs. Ralston, catching a sober look on her nephew's expressive countenance as he sat down beside her. Max smiled and took Molly's pink foot in his hand.

"Molly and I thought maybe we would both be sent to bed," he said whimsically.

Mrs. Ralston gave him a second glance. The reply seemed to her evasive, but Max was laughing at Molly and the thoughtful expression had vanished.

"There comes June!" he exclaimed. "I hope I've some letters."

June was waving a handful of mail and papers. "Two for mother — both from father; three more from unknown people! Hope has one — where is she? Max gets the lion's share, seven letters for Maxfield R. Hamilton, Esq. I hope you're satisfied!"

Max had no time for reply. One thin, foreign correspondence envelope bore his address in his father's peculiar and individual penmanship and he had torn it open at once.

"*Please,* may we have supper?" demanded June a little later.

Neither mother nor cousin looked up from the engrossing letters. June secured a tin pan and a couple of clothespins and proceeded to sound an alarm that delighted Molly and roused his mother from her preoccupation.

"What a racket, June! Yes, we'll have supper. Max, can the rest of your mail wait? Molly, call sister Hope."

Max came to the table with Professor Hamilton's dear, cheery letter tucked into his pocket, making a warm little spot above his heart. Mrs. Ralston was smiling over some news she had received and presently she told it.

"Father thinks this lake is safe for a canoe and

he is sending one up for you. It was shipped four days before he wrote, so should soon be here."

June shouted and even Hope looked more cheerful.

"Isn't that great! Won't we have larks! Oh, Mother, when's he coming himself?"

"He isn't sure, but he hopes within a fortnight."

"A canoe! Won't we have fun! Max, do you paddle?"

"A little," replied his cousin quietly, but his face had lighted with pleasure over this prospect.

"The way you 'swim a little' and then turn out to be a regular fish?" inquired June.

"Paddling is only a knack. I've done it on rivers, but never on a lake."

"I have my suspicions," went on June. "After the way you beat me to a finish at tennis and developed fins the minute you went into the lake, I don't know what will happen when you get hold of a paddle. There's one thing though you can't do yet — pitch a ball I can't hit!"

"Neither can I equal your 'chinning' record," acknowledged Max, "but I'll do them both before the summer is over. It will be no end jolly to have the canoe. I think it's awfully kind of Uncle George to send it. I do so wish he'd come, for I want to see him. Dad has often told me what larks they used to have together in college."

Max was anxious to return to his unread letters and as soon as supper was over, he seated himself on the doorstep. One epistle caused him so much amusement that his bursts of laughter made the others smile in sympathy. June's curiosity was finally aroused.

"Max, is that a manuscript joke book you have there?"

"No, it's a perfectly killing letter from Connie Lisle," replied his cousin, looking up with tears of merriment in his eyes.

"If it is as funny as all that, do read it to us."

"It is simply rich, and even though you don't know her, you can't help thinking it comical. Would you care to hear it, Auntie?"

"Yes, indeed! Just wait till I see what Molly wants and get my sewing."

Hope settled herself in a shaded corner of the porch. No words had been exchanged since she and her brother parted at the big walnut. Sunny-tempered June disliked to have Hope unhappy and was sorry for her, though still thinking her in the wrong. It was a pleasant diversion when Mrs. Ralston returned and his cousin began to read.

CHAPTER IX

CONNIE'S LETTER

"PORTRAE, HEBRIDES, July 14.

"DEAR MAX:

"I expect you'll wonder what on earth I'm doing in the Isle of Skye, but here I am! I know when we parted in London you thought we were going to Ireland and so we did. We sailed from Milford Haven to Cork and it was altogether nasty. The mater went to bed at once and I came near jumping overboard, I was that disgusted with life. However, the captain invited me into the wheelhouse and I staid till I was as sick as could be. That night was something beastly!

"When we reached Cork we took a cab with the boxes on top. Somehow we got mixed with a procession and I looked out to find that we were crawling along with a brass band in front and a row of little donkey carts behind and most of the boys in Cork lined up on either side. I'd been feeling quite low, but this cheered me. The mater had her eyes shut and I thought she'd better keep on resting!

"Lis-na-lee was a great place and I had the time of my life! Only I did miss you! There were a lot of jolly young people and we had no end of sport, but I wished you'd been there to help things along. We had a tub race on the river one day, all in bathing dresses and everybody in a tub. I went under about fifteen times and was perfectly water-logged when I came out.

The Heronhaye girls ran away from their governess and the mater didn't know what we were up to. I wish you could have seen the face of that governess when she came down to the bank and saw what Christine and Pat and the boys and I were doing! She heard the noise — I fancy it could be heard in the next county! Patricia had lost one bathing sandal and a stocking, and she'd somehow come down into the mud headfirst and her hair was something awful! Mine was full of weeds, but hers was worse, being curly. Chris had torn her skirt 'most off and her tub came apart and all the pieces were floating round the river.

"We had to come up to the house and take hot baths and shampoos and be lectured. It was tea-time before we were finished with. I was perfectly worn out, but it was worth it.

"The worst thing we did, though, was one Saturday afternoon when we were sent to the village on an errand. The church is a pretty, little old one and in a sort of tower arrangement is a place where the curate keeps his vestments. They were hanging there ready for the next day. We couldn't resist the temptation to devote a little of our valuable time to those priestly garments.

"Next morning the bell rang for service and of course we all had to go. It was eleven and the curate never came, and it grew to be five minutes after and he didn't come, and fifteen, and still he didn't come. The organist was 'most crazy and he played the same thing over four times. Pat and I were growing a little bored, when finally the choir and the curate arrived. He was red in the face and all hot, and no wonder, for we stuck a whole paper of pins into his cassock and sewed up the sleeves of his surplice. Sir Arthur

thought the sermon was delivered with unusual feeling that morning. Pat and I thought so, too; we knew what the feeling was!"

"Connie wouldn't have played that trick if I'd been there," said Max rather apologetically as he looked up from the letter. "Really, that's going too far!"

"Could you have stopped her?" asked June curiously.

"Indeed, I could! I've helped Connie do a good many things she shouldn't, but never anything like that. Oh, she would have stopped! This next part is more comical."

"Monday was market day and we went to the village. The peasant women had come in from all around with their donkeys and they were tied together behind a shed a little away from the market. I mean the donkeys, not the women. They were perfect ducks, and Pat and I harnessed five of them to a little cart and started for a drive. The peasants were awfully amused that we wanted to take those donkeys and we could have had them all. We wanted to hitch them tandem, and if you'd been there to help, I would have, but as it was, we thought they'd do better fan-shaped.

"We cut some sticks in the hedge and started in fine style. I wanted to drive up to Lis-na-lee but Pat didn't dare. She said she didn't mind her mother's seeing us, but if we met Sir Arthur there was likely to be a row. So we drove on past Lis-na-lee, and after a while turned around. We had just passed the park

entrance on our way back to the village when we met the church militant, *very* militant! He caught sight of us, and if ever I saw a man in a wax, it was that curate!

"Of course he was on his way to tell of us at Lis-na-lee and something had to be done and that mighty quickly. So Pat stopped punching the donkeys and I hauled them in and asked him just as sweetly as I could if he wouldn't take a drive with us. He stared and muttered something about our 'beastly cheek,' and then suddenly he grinned and said he would. He was quite a young curate. So he piled into the back of the cart and Pat prodded up the donkeys. We went so fast and rattled around so, that he couldn't talk, and we didn't want him to! Just at the top of the hill going down to the village, the boys, Nevil and Hugh, burst out on their ponies and you ought to have seen the way we all crashed down into that village, dogs barking, everybody yelling, and the ponies and donkeys going for all they were worth!

"I managed to haul up before the curate's lodgings. He'd lost his hat in the race and the boys went back for it. He said he'd had a very enjoyable drive and I said I hoped we might have the pleasure of his company again. He wasn't a bad sort, that curate, for he didn't tell of us, and Pat at least, certainly would have caught it if Sir Arthur had known.

"I told Mamma about it afterwards and she moaned and exclaimed, 'Patricia Heronhaye and Constance Lisle!' The idea seemed too much for her."

"It was lucky for Connie that Colonel Lisle wasn't there," commented Max when the amusement over the donkey drive had subsided. "Aunt May is easy, but Uncle Dick would think that pinning up the curate's

cassock was one of the 'things a fellow doesn't do!' That's all about her visit in Ireland."

"We're up here in Skye, staying in a cottage and it's heavenly! Daddy is in Perthshire and he's going to stop there all through August. Max, it is simply wonderful here, heather and gorse and moors and more sky and sunshine and stars than anywhere else in the world! I've been such a saint, too! I hardly know myself and I must tell you something that will make you shriek. Yesterday the mater and I were walking through the village and I saw a nice man in a swell suit of tweeds. I said to Mamma, 'That's Mr. Thornley!' She said it couldn't be but I rushed up behind him and it was St. George!"

"Is that his name?" asked June.

"No," replied Max. "His name is Christopher, but Connie and I named him St. George. We didn't like always to call him Mr. Thornley, so we chose that for him."

"It's a tremendously interesting letter," declared June. "Do go on."

"He and his mother were stopping at another cottage and Mamma went directly to see dear Granny Thornley. St. George and I leaned over the gate and he at once inquired what sins I'd committed since he saw me last. I'd just finished telling him about the donkeys and the curate, and he was chuckling inside the way he does, when they called us to tea. Now, I'm coming to the part that will make you shriek.

"There wasn't room for us all in the tiny parlor, for there was another lady with Mamma and Mrs.

Thornley, so St. George and I stopped on the porch and they handed the tea through the window. I was just finishing mine when we heard the other lady say to Mamma: 'You must take great comfort with Constance; she is such a sweet, gentle, docile daughter!'

"Mamma's 'sweet, gentle, docile daughter' almost choked to death and St. George tried so hard not to laugh that he pretty nearly exploded. He couldn't help giving a funny gasp and Granny inquired, 'Did you speak, Christopher?'

"St. George looked straight at me, and said: 'No, Mother, I was merely thinking!'

"Wasn't that perfectly terrible? Of course, it must have been trying for poor, dear Mamma, who knows what a wild Irishman I am! You see I really do look rather meek, now my frocks are longer, and my hair turned in a coil at the back of my head. I've put it up since Lis-na-lee.

"July 16. This is a tremendously long letter but you simply must stand it, for it's going to be longer. You could never guess where I'm writing now,—on the very top of the Storr! Last evening St. George came and said he wanted to climb the Storr to-day and asked if I might go with him. Mamma was perfectly willing, for you know she thinks St. George is under-study to the angel Gabriel, so here I am! We left about eight and it has been perfect for St. George is just as dear and nice as always.

"Here at the top, it's divine. To be sure, on the way up, the cork blew out of the apollinaris bottle and hit me in the arm and I thought I was shot and let out a yell. We have had lunch, such a funny Scotch one, oatcakes and cheese and jam. It seemed queer not to fight with you about the jam! St. George is smoking, having asked my permission very nicely, as if I were

quite grown up. I told him he'd carried a pipe in the corner of his mouth so long that it looked like a tailor's button-hole, but he only laughed.

"You can't imagine anything more lovely than this blue sea and blue sky with fat clouds sailing around in it, and the sunlight and shadow on the water and the misty, dark hills. The gorse and heather make the air so sweet. In places on the moors are cairns where people are buried. Wouldn't it be interesting if suddenly they should all come out? St. George has just told me a lovely little poem that begins:

"'Blow softly down the valley,
Oh, wind, and stir the fern
That waves its green fronds over
The King of Ireland's cairn.

"'Here in his last wild foray
He fell, and here he lies—
His armor makes no rattle
The clay is in his eyes.'

"We have been talking about every subject you can imagine. It is a great comfort to have St. George to talk with again, for he always listens so politely and as if your opinions were just as important as any one's.

"The mater and I miss you most awfully. I cried half the morning when you left for Liverpool. Having you with us for so many weeks made it terribly lonesome without you. I'm not a bit good when I'm ill, and Mamma really is lost without you to pet and fuss over. Daddy was grumpy, too, and said it was ridiculous how he missed that boy! By the way, St. George says he really is going over to New York in August and shall plan to come back with you. I'm going to ask Mamma to let me go with him.

"Oh, Max, when you come, will you bring me a paper model for an American frock? You know what pretty frocks those girls we met in Rome had? I want one for evening. Perhaps your cousin Hope will choose it for me; she's only a little younger than I am, and will know what I would like. I have a new blue Liberty silk in which I feel very swell, but I want another, a white one, and I'd like it to be made in an American way. I know you are having a fine time with your cousins and I'm keen to get your letter telling about them. The mater is going to write you herself because she wants to give you some good advice, probably about eating too much jam. Do you remember that day when we got it on the towels and how waxy Ferry was?

"Uncle Rod is sending me souvenir postcards from every place he stops. He said he would, you know, and I'm perfectly wild over them. Six came at once yesterday.

"St. George says he's written you by this mail, but I may send his love, the quality he keeps specially for the people he likes best.

"Good-by, dear Max, I am always your loving

"CONNIE."

"She must be more fun than a monkey!" pronounced June, who had found the letter very entertaining. "She certainly makes things move."

"That she does!" assented Max. "There's never any lack of action when Connie's around! The things she does, sound rather shocking, Auntie, but though you might not think it, Connie really is a lady."

"I can readily believe it, Max; I see that from the letter. In spite of her mischievous pranks, it shows that she is sweet and wholesome and girlish. Her little revelations of herself are charmingly naïve. Hope, we must surely see that Connie has her dress pattern."

Hope had been interested and amused by the letter and rather pleased at the reference to herself.

"Yes, we'll choose a pretty one," she replied, and June looked up quickly. Hope had spoken in quite her usual way. Perhaps the tempest under the walnut would be followed by pleasant weather.

"I had such a dandy mail!" Max went on. "Besides this, there was a letter from Dad and a jolly one from St. George — he's really coming across; and then a note from Aunt May and one from Uncle Dick in Scotland, besides two from boys at school."

"Did Mrs. Lisle caution you about eating jam?" asked June.

"No," laughed his cousin. "She's afraid I'll do too much and wants me to lie down every afternoon and rest. If she could see how tanned I am and what an appetite I have, and know I've gained seven pounds in three weeks, she wouldn't worry. I wish you could know Mrs. Lisle, Aunt Helen! You'd like her so much!"

"Max is so excited over his letters that he won't sleep to-night," said June. "Mother, perhaps you'd

better let him have the kittens just this once to compose his mind."

"I don't wonder Max is excited," replied Mrs. Ralston. "Are you pleased that Mr. Thornley is coming?"

"Indeed, I am! I hope there will be a chance for you to see him."

"I thought Connie's letter showed him as being a very interesting person. I should like to meet him."

"We are tremendously fond of St. George," said Max eagerly. "He is immensely popular with all the boys at school, but Connie and I have known him so intimately that we feel we have a special claim on him. Often he gets up early on Sunday mornings for a walk, and we almost always go with him. Sometimes we climb Janiculum or go to the Pincian Hill or the Borghese Gardens, but we usually bring up at a little shop where they sell English buns, and always St. George stops at the Spanish steps to buy flowers for his mother. I never knew him to go home on Sunday morning without flowers for Granny."

"I am wildly anxious to see what kind of schoolmaster this paragon may be!" began June. He had not as yet succeeded in really teasing his cousin and was delighted when Max turned upon him emphatically.

"If you ever meet him and inside of twelve hours

don't think he's about right I sha'n't have any further use for you."

"Ah, got a rise that time!" chuckled June. "I'm entirely open to conviction, but come, own up! Isn't he the kind who calls a fellow into his office and labors with him earnestly, perseveringly, and at length, about his moral influence in the school and the duty of setting a good example to the younger boys?"

"Not exactly!" retorted Max in amusement so genuine that his cousin was silenced. "The fellow would spend about two minutes in the study and what he heard would be something like this: 'See here, this won't answer! If you disregard that rule, all the kids will think they may. Look at me now, and tell me if you're going to do it again!'"

CHAPTER X

THE NEXT DAY

HOPE woke the next morning with a feeling of general discomfort. Her face was hot and flushed and as she raised her hand to her head, the fingers seemed stiff and unmanageable. Something, too, was wrong with her eyes, for she could scarcely open them.

Springing from bed, she glanced into the little mirror over her improvised dressing-table. It gave at best, a cloudy and crooked reflection, but that alone was never responsible for the image which looked back at Hope. She stared in horror at the puffed, swollen face with two slits for eyes, and brows standing out like angry bristles.

Mrs. Ralston sat up as her daughter rushed into the room, her face expressing a dismay only surpassed by Hope's own consternation.

"Mother, what *is* the matter with me?" wailed Hope, holding her swollen hands straight before her. They were nearly twice their natural size and so uncomfortable they fairly ached. "Is it leprosy?"

"No, of course not! Have you been near any

poison ivy? It looks like something of that kind, but come here and let me see."

Hope knew poison ivy and was certain she had not touched any.

"Or swamp sumach; that's poisonous, too. But you were in almost all day yesterday; did you touch any unfamiliar shrubs or vines when you went to the postoffice?"

Hope suddenly remembered the little bush under the walnut tree and the leaves she had so ruthlessly stripped.

"I'm afraid it was poison-sumach!" sighed Mrs. Ralston. "I will bring you some saleratus water to bathe your face. That will do no harm and may be soothing. You'd better go back to your bed, or would you rather stay in mine? I'm very sorry, darling, but though it's uncomfortable, it isn't dangerous, and won't last forever."

"I don't want the boys to see me," sobbed poor Hope as she crept into her mother's bed.

"I know they won't laugh, and if it lasts several days they will help the time pass for you."

"I can't have them see me," choked Hope, burying her face in the pillow."

"Then they shall not. Don't cry, dearie; it only makes the matter worse. I will send June for Mrs. Tyler; she will know what to do, and whether that shrub was the poisonous sumach. We will telephone

for the nearest doctor if necessary, so just be patient for a little."

To practise patience was difficult when Hope felt so dreadfully miserable and sick, and it seemed quite unbearable when Molly tiptoed in, gave a single glance at the swollen, discolored face, and fled in dismay. She could not believe that dreadful-looking creature to be her own dear sister!

Sounds came to Hope's ears from other parts of the house. June and Max arose from their cots under the big apple tree where they usually spent the night, and went down to the lake for their morning dip. Apparently, they had a race on the way back, for they came in laughing and rushed into their room. Their merriment annoyed Hope and it even seemed unnecessary that the morning itself should be so bright and beautiful.

Presently her mother returned, compassionate and reassuring.

"June has gone to ask Mrs. Tyler to come over. Max offers you his deep sympathy and both he and June have promised solemnly not to laugh if you feel like dressing and coming out."

"I don't want to see any one, Mamma."

"Not even Charlotte and Nan? They will be so sorry and will surely want to do something to comfort you."

"N — no," said Hope doubtfully, "not even them.

Perhaps I will to-morrow, but oh, Mamma, I do feel so horridly!"

"I know it, dearie; it's a shame! Now, I'm going to comb and braid your hair so you will look neat for Mrs. Tyler."

Hope submitted, glad to be a little girl again and feel Mother's gentle hands arranging her hair.

"Who is getting breakfast?" she inquired suddenly.

"Max," replied her mother with a laugh. "He assured me that he could 'do topping toast and turn out a very high-class poached egg!'"

"He will make a dreadful mess!" grumbled Hope.

"It isn't much matter if he does, and he wanted to help. Molly is so fascinated by the sight of Max in a kitchen apron that she is figuratively tied to its string."

Hope's toilet was completed and the room set in order by the time June returned.

"Mrs. Tyler will be right over, Mother," he announced outside the door. "Polly Anne, mayn't I come in? I won't crack a single smile at your expense, not one, on my honor!"

Hope still refused and she would not even reply when Max ventured a remark.

"Hope, do let me exhibit myself. You've no idea how a cook's apron becomes my peculiar style of beauty."

"Poison-sumach and no mistake!" said Mrs. Tyler with her first view of the unfortunate victim. "Was it under the big walnut? There was some there last fall; I knew it when the leaves turned and I meant to have Father root it out, but I forgot it from that day to this. You want a solution of sugar of lead. Alcohol is good, too; it will do no harm to use both. Just plain soap and water isn't to be despised either."

"I have alcohol," said Mrs. Ralston, "but I suppose sugar of lead is to be obtained only in town."

"Father's going to town after some farm tools today and he'll get it for you. I'll write it down so he won't make any mistake. You can use the alcohol till he gets back. Have you plenty of that? I'll send the lead up as soon as it comes; one of the Walker girls will be glad to bring it. I'll tell them about Hope's misfortune and they'll be over to chirk her up. It's pleasant for the girls to have Hope so near and they take real comfort in it. They are such nice girls, too; Charlotte is just as sweet and capable! Nan, though she's a bit unexpected, is a real companionable, loving little creature. I never saw such an energetic piece as she is; she's on the go from morning till night. You never see her sitting down and resting like other folks; she lights for a moment and then she's up and away. They're nice girls, and Father takes considerable stock in both of them. No, thank you,

Mrs. Ralston; I had my breakfast a couple of hours ago, but I must be getting home or there won't be any dinner for my boarders."

When Hope's breakfast came, she eyed it suspiciously, thinking to find eccentric traces of Max's cookery. There were none; the tray was very attractive with its cup of chocolate, crisp toast, and poached egg, while laid on her napkin were two beautiful water-lilies with golden hearts wide-open and pinky-white petals still jeweled with shining drops.

"Max is a model cook; he didn't make the least 'mess,'" said Mrs. Ralston cheerily. "The toast is beautifully browned and the eggs done just right. But he considers the lilies his chief triumph; he brought them from his morning swim."

"They are lovely," acknowledged Hope a little unwillingly. She felt ill as well as uncomfortable and was glad to lie down. It seemed strange to stay in bed and hear the familiar household processes going on without her. Max and June were doing the dishes and making good sport of the task. She heard June return a plate, apparently not properly washed, with a frank comment on his cousin's carelessness, and Max replied, "'It's a pretty poor dish-wiper who can't get off what the washer leaves!'"

Hope did not hear June's response, for steps passed her window, and then came Charlotte's voice.

"Won't she see us? We'd love to read to her or

wait on her or do the least thing for her. You think she'd really rather not?"

The closed blinds of the window opened just a crack and a beautiful pink rose came flying in.

"I'm awfully sorry, Hope dear," said Nan. "I wish you would let me do something for you."

"Oh, Nan, I *look* so dreadfully and I feel worse!"

"When I love people I don't care how they look! I love you, Hope; won't you let me come and be comforting to you?"

Hope could not resist that appeal, and Anstice, having made the surrender known to Mrs. Ralston, came in like a sunbeam.

"I'm too awful to kiss," remonstrated Hope. "Besides, you might get it on you."

"I suppose that is so," said Anstice, sitting down on the floor. "There's a place here above your elbow; it can't do any harm to kiss that. I'm so sorry, Hope darling. I've brought the new *St. Nicholas* to read to you. Charlotte's shelling peas with your mother and the boys and we'll just have a happy time together."

In spite of Anstice's loving sympathy and her mother's care, the day was a long one for Hope, since her discomfort was considerable. During the afternoon she fell into a half-sleep, in which it was hard to distinguish between dreaming and waking. Had she imagined that some one tiptoed into the room?

There on a chair beside her bed was a grape leaf full of luscious red raspberries.

"Charlotte brought them, dear," said her mother. "They are the last of the season."

Hope lay quietly, watching the needle flashing in and out of Mrs. Ralston's work. It was growing into a dainty smocked frock for Molly. At a distance she could hear bursts of laughter and presently Anstice's happy voice. "Play ball!" it sang, and Hope instantly pictured the game that was going on. Were they tossing the ball back and forth or did they have a bat?

"Play up, play up!" came June's deeper tones.

Hope turned with a sigh. It must be nice out there in the sunny meadow where the grass was all harvested and only the short stubble left. She knew just how Charlotte's pigtail was flying behind her as she ran and how Anstice was dancing up and down with excitement.

"Why, Mother, what's happened?" she asked, a little startled, for the ball players, apparently as one person, stampeded past the house. Mrs. Ralston rose to look from the window.

"It is the canoe! Mr. Tyler has brought it over for us."

At this exciting news, Hope found her imprisonment almost unendurable. Not to be present at the uncrating and launching of that craft was indeed hard.

Rather than miss it, she was almost ready to show herself in public.

"It really is all Max's fault," she thought bitterly as her mother went to speak with Mr. Tyler. "If it hadn't been for Max, I shouldn't have quarreled with June, nor stopped by the wall, nor touched that hateful old bush, and I wouldn't have been poisoned!"

Hope might have continued still further her disastrous "House that Jack built," but curiosity mastered resentment and she crept to the window. They were all grouped around the crated canoe which had been taken from the cart and lay on the grass by the road. It was wrapped in sacking besides being crated, but the rough bagging could not conceal the graceful curves beneath.

June came running with hammer and chisel and he and Max worked eagerly. Even Mr. Tyler seemed interested to get the canoe unwrapped and Charlotte had borrowed a knife and was ripping away at the stitches in the covering. So many hands made the process a quick one, and in five minutes the canoe lay before them, a thing of beauty in its graceful proportions — shining with green paint and spar varnish. Fastened inside were the paddles and two backboards for the accommodation of passengers.

Hope put on her wrapper to go into the living-room and watch from its windows the royal progress of the canoe to the lake. Max and June were carrying it

without the slightest effort, escorted by Charlotte with the paddles and Anstice with the backboards. Molly gamboled around the procession, and Mrs. Ralston and Mr. Tyler brought up the rear. Apparently no one even thought of Hope's disappointment.

Mrs. Ralston would not permit both girls to go on the trial trip, but in a moment Hope saw the canoe skimming rapidly along the edge of the lake, Max steering, June with the bow paddle, and Anstice sitting flat in the bottom. It skirted the shore for some distance, then came back and exchanged Anstice for Charlotte.

At the same moment, Mrs. Ralston turned toward the cottage, Molly hanging back and very openly rebellious because she was not allowed to go with the "big children." Hope stole miserably to her bed, and did not feel like responding pleasantly when her mother came.

"Here is the sugar of lead, and I think by to-morrow the worst of the swelling may be over. They were all so sorry you couldn't be out to try the canoe. June offered to wait, and so did Max, but I knew you wouldn't want them to do that."

Hope was not so sure; her disappointment and impatience were keen, and she made no response.

"It is a beauty, sixteen feet long, and very light and easily handled. You will have great pleasure with it, and it seems safe on this especial lake. I

didn't dare let Molly go, and she was quite naughty. It isn't good for her to have no playmates of her own age; she gets too much petting and has no one to whom she must give up. She makes perfect slaves of Charlotte and Max."

Hope bathed her poor distorted face in silence. Her brother's easy postponement of that cherished summer plan had prejudiced her against her cousin before he ever came. The ready liking June instantly evinced for him, her mother's affection, Molly's open devotion,— all contributed to make Hope stand aloof, nor could she rid herself of the suspicion that Max was secretly contemptuous of their simple way of life. Charlotte and Nan, much as she liked them, could not make up to Hope for the undeniable fact that her companionship was less essential to June since Max's arrival.

"It seems to me your face isn't so swollen; doesn't it feel any better?" asked her mother tenderly. "You've been so patient all day. Perhaps to-morrow you will feel like coming out. We are planning to make some cushions for the canoe, just covers to be filled with hay. The girls are to help, and you shall lie in the hammock in the living-room and the boys will take turns reading aloud while we sew."

"I know they'll laugh at me."

"Indeed, they won't, dearie; they both promised me they would not. You have not seemed like yourself

for the past few days and I think perhaps our housekeeping has worn on you more than I realized. When you are well again, we are all going to Mrs. Tyler's for dinner, and get just our breakfast and supper here. That will be no more work than is good for us."

This proof of her mother's watchful care was almost too much for Hope. Had Molly not come in crying at that moment, she might have confessed why she had been unlike herself. Certainly the housework was not the cause.

By the time Molly's broken heart was mended by comfort and kisses duly administered, Hope had recovered her self-possession and was moved to enthusiasm over a confidence from her mother.

"And now, darling, I'll tell you a secret. Father is surely coming next week. He doesn't know the day, but he will be here without fail."

CHAPTER XI

CONCERNING MR. LEMON AND MRS. LEMOINE

CHARLOTTE and Max sat on the slope of a sunny hill overlooking the lake. The morning was cool and sunshine was preferable to shadow. Charlotte had even buttoned her sweater — her "woolly," as she preferred to call it since Max had told her its English name.

They had started for blueberries, but there were not many in Charlotte's pail and Max had spilled the few he had gathered. It was difficult to concentrate one's attention on berry-picking when the world was so beautiful, all blue, white, and green. Down on the lake were three black dots — probably loons.

"I keep thinking about that man Mr. Smith told us of,— the one who hasn't spoken to a woman for thirty years," remarked Charlotte after a long pause. "It seems so dreadful!"

"Doesn't it?" replied her companion, shying a chip at a squirrel that was eyeing them inquisitively around the trunk of a tree. "When Mr. Smith told us that story, the man's name struck me as familiar, but at the time I couldn't remember where I'd heard it, nor

what association I had with it. The other day it popped right into my mind."

"What do you mean?" inquired Charlotte wonderingly.

"Shut up, will you?" remarked Max to the insulted squirrel that was now scolding him vigorously, sputtering away in the tree top like an angry little firecracker. "You see," he went on to Charlotte, "that day when we were under the shed, the man himself came and looked at us from an attic window. I didn't tell you, because then I didn't know you very well and I was afraid you would be frightened. I was rather amazed myself," he admitted frankly, "because he was such a queer-looking old spook. When Mr. Smith told us his story and said his name was Lemon, I knew it must really be Lemoine, only they don't know how to pronounce it. The other day I remembered where I'd heard it, and really, Charlotte, it seems as if it might be his wife that I know about."

"Oh, you don't mean it!" exclaimed Charlotte, her eyes shining with excitement. "Max, I never heard anything so interesting! Do tell me about it. Wouldn't it be great if we could really find her and perhaps get her to come back and civilize him again?"

"Wouldn't it be something great and awful?" agreed Max. "You see, I've thought quite a little about it, and the other day when I drove to the village with Mr. Tyler, I asked him what he knew about

Mr. Lemon or Lemoine. He told me just what Mr. Smith did, only he said that the priest in Camden wrote to Kitty and tried very hard to make her come back and live with her husband, and that later, some man in Montreal, who is a great philanthropist and does ever so much good for people, tried to have them reconciled. Mr. Tyler said that Kitty was young and gay, and it was hard for her to live in so isolated a place among people who were so serious and quiet and different from those she'd been used to. He thought she stood it just as long as she possibly could, and that she and Mr. Lemon quarrelled over some mere trifle; perhaps a poorly cooked meal or something as trivial as that. At any rate, she went away. Neither the priest nor the Montreal man succeeded in making things right and it was rumored that she went to France, though Mr. Tyler said he also heard that both she and the baby died.

"Now, I'm coming to what I remembered the other night. When I went to the Lisles' this spring, I had a relapse and had to have a nurse again, and one came who belonged to a Catholic sisterhood. She was called Sister Angélique, but the interesting part of it was that she was one of the nuns who had been expelled from France and had taken refuge in Jersey.

"When she left France, her mother came with her to St. Helier's, and she had a little place where she raised vegetables and flowers. She brought them to

the Lisles' house, and this woman's name was Catherine Lemoine!"

Max stopped to enjoy the excitement that was blazing in Charlotte's eyes.

"It's hard to know how old any of those Catholic sisters are, for they all look alike in their nun's dress, but Sister Angélique must have been over thirty, and she once told me that her mother had lived in the States and that she herself was born here!"

Max had saved this statement for a climax and was pleased with the effect it produced on Charlotte.

"It seems impossible that it can be wrong!" she exclaimed when the first excitement was over. "Catherine Lemoine must have been Kitty Lemon, and if she has a daughter about the age that baby would be now, and born in America, too — why, Max, that *settles* it! What are you going to do; tell Mr. Lemon and let him write to them?"

"I've thought quite carefully about that, and I'm afraid he wouldn't. You see he's lived alone and in that queer way so long — he must necessarily have grown rather daffy. Now, Mrs. Lemoine and Sister Angélique have been living among people and it seems to me they would be more likely to do something. Mr. Tyler said he didn't believe that if Kitty was living, she knew Mr. Lemon was still here, since before she left he had been talking of selling out and going back to Canada. Very probably they have had no idea where

he has been all these years and would be glad to be told."

"Then you'll write to them?"

"That was what I planned. I can write to Mrs. Lemoine in care of Sister Angélique at the convent in St. Helier's. I don't believe Sister Angélique has forgotten me; it's not likely, since only a few months ago she was washing my face and spooning soup down my throat. She was a good sort," said Max, reaching for a particularly fat berry and settling into a more comfortable position among the sweet fern and blueberry bushes.

"Oh, do write at once! Doesn't it take a long time to get an answer to a letter that goes so far? It would be dreadful if you didn't have a reply before we went away from here."

"I have the letter written. I brought it to show you, and I was going to talk about Mr. Lemon. It was odd that you spoke first. I think there will be time for an answer, for Auntie says they shall stay here until about the middle of September, and I don't have to be in Rome till the third week of October. Still, if St. George comes, I shall go back with him, and he may have to sail earlier. But there should be time, and this is the letter. I've written it in French, but I'll translate for you, or will you read it?"

"No, thank you," protested Charlotte. "That's too much like a school exercise! Read it to me."

Max recalled himself to Mrs. Lemoine's mind as the American boy, the guest of the Lisles, whom Sister Angélique had nursed through an illness that spring. He outlined Mr. Lemon's story, and in words that were rather tactfully chosen for a lad of sixteen, suggested that if this Mr. Lemon was in truth her husband, she might be glad to know his whereabouts and rejoice at the opportunity to rejoin him.

"It's a nice letter and I think you've expressed it beautifully," commented Charlotte. "But — oh, Max," she hesitated, "it does seem a big thing to undertake!"

"I know it, but if it is really so, it is something that ought to be done," replied her companion with his eyes fixed on the distant top of Baldface. "Just think how glad they will all be!"

"It would be lovely to have her come back and make him be civilized and take down that dreadful gravestone from the door. I shall be terribly proud of you if you really succeed in getting it done."

"I don't see why it shouldn't come out all right. It seems as if it must be true. But let's not tell any one else; let's keep it our secret. When the letter comes — that will be time enough to tell other people."

Charlotte willingly agreed. "Are you going to say anything to Mr. Lemon?" she added.

"That depends. The day we were on the mountain, I lost a pin that was fastened to my woolly. I

suppose I lost it in the woods in one of those scratchy places, but it will be an excuse to go back and ask Mr. Lemon if he found it under his woodshed. I shall tell him that it came from France and that will give him a chance to ask if I have been there. What I say next will depend on him."

"How cleverly you've planned it!" said Charlotte in admiration. "When you go, Max, I'll go with you as far as the top of the hill before we reach the bushes that the path winds through, and wait for you there, for I must know right straight off just what happens. It won't do for me to go any nearer, but I'll wait there and he will never suspect."

"Yes, we can plan that. I think it's rather sport."

"I've read about such things, but I never supposed I should really be in anything of the kind," sighed Charlotte. "Max, I can't stay here another second! This sweet fern is positively alive with horrid yellow worms!"

Charlotte sprang up and crashed through the bushes to a spot where no sweet fern grew. Even then she regarded her surroundings with suspicion.

"They won't hurt you," said Max, following lazily.

"They are almost as bad as cows, and I am mortally afraid of cows. I shouldn't mind if they didn't look at me, but they stare so, that I am sure they are intelligent and are getting ready to do things to me."

"Nan likes them; she tried to ride a half-grown one the other day."

"Mr. Tyler was quite annoyed about it and Mamma said it was very unladylike. She sent Nan to bed that night directly after tea."

"There's the canoe!" exclaimed Max. "June and the girls must have come back from the creamery. I'll bet they have more butter than we have berries! But who is that with them? That's surely Auntie and Hope in the bottom, and Molly, too,—I see her red frock. But who besides June is paddling? It is a man!"

"Let's call to them," suggested Charlotte, looking for her handkerchief to wave.

Max put his hands to his mouth and shouted through them. Baldface, on the other side of the lake, sent back a faint echo, but the canoe kept steadily on its way.

"No use!" said Max after his third unsuccessful attempt. "The wind must carry the sound in another direction."

"We really ought to pick some berries, for we've wasted most of the morning. Let's race and see who fills a pail first."

Max won, for the yellow worms restricted the area where Charlotte felt safe to pick. The berries were so plentiful that it was not difficult to gather a pailful when once they set about it in earnest.

As they sauntered down the fragrant hillside on their homeward way, the canoe reappeared at the base of Baldface.

"Do not forget," said Max mysteriously as they reached the Tyler gate, "about Mr. Lemon, I mean. And by the way, I am going to call you Carlotta. That is the Italian form of your name and I think it suits you. Good-by, Carlotta, I'll probably see you again in half an hour or so."

Max went on to the cottage, whistling gayly. He heard voices in the kitchen and just at the door met a tall gentleman coming out.

"This must be Max!" said the newcomer. "Max, dear fellow, I'm glad indeed to see you at last! What does Rodney's boy look like?"

Uncle George had laid a hand on the shoulder that was on a level with his own, and was looking at him with a very critical though kindly glance.

"Yes, you're Rodney's boy all right enough," he said, his rather stern lips breaking into a smile that lighted his whole face. "It isn't our fault we've never seen you before. If your Aunt Helen and I had had our way, you and June would have grown up as brothers."

"And how about my Dad?" laughed Max, speaking for the first time since his involuntary exclamation of "Uncle George!"

"Ah, there was the sticking point. Dad happened to want you himself! Well, judging from appearances, Dad hasn't made a bad job of you!"

"I wish he was here!" said Max, blushing and showing his handsome teeth in a smile. "I feel as though I knew you, Uncle, after all the things I've heard of you."

"Max, I've always been discreet in the things I've let June know of my boyhood. Now, if Rodney has rashly told you tales June has never heard, just you keep still about them!"

"Max and I will have a session at once, and I will ascertain how much lime-light he is able to throw on my father's school and college life," put in June mischievously.

Mr. Ralston again seized Max by the shoulder.

"I see I shall have to keep you beside me, young man, until I have learned what deeds of my misspent past your dad has related to you. But seriously speaking, Max, it is a great pleasure to me to have you and June together."

"We've got along without much fighting," June volunteered. "But that's wholly due to my naturally angelic disposition. I always give in to Max! Mother'll testify to that; she told me before he came that I must be polite to him!"

Max grinned. "I didn't realize that these were

still your company manners! After this, June, do try to be natural! This artificial atmosphere gets oppressive."

"Mamma!" interrupted Molly, "make Max stop. Molly wants to talk!"

"There speaks our youngest!" said Mr. Ralston. "Come here, Molly Cottontail, and you shall have a chance to talk."

CHAPTER XII

A MORNING SWIM

JUNE and Max were out early on the morning after Mr. Ralston's arrival. The sun had scarcely risen when they reached the lake and launched the canoe.

"Wait, will you?" called a voice. "I want to go along."

Max laughed as he saw the figure hurrying down the path. To say the least, Uncle George looked unconventional, attired in bathing-suit, canvas shoes, and a sweater.

"June, I didn't think you'd treat your old father like this! I heard you go, and hustled down here so fast you couldn't see me for the dust. But, of course, if I'm not wanted —"

"I'm so in the habit of not wanting you!" June replied in the same tone. "We spoke about waking you but thought perhaps you'd rather sleep the first morning. Fire out some cushions, Max. *We* dispense with such luxuries, but I reckon you'll want them. Go ahead, Father, and don't step on the gunwale."

"I've a mind to run a race round it," remarked Mr.

Ralston. "I paddled a canoe before you were in existence, young man!"

"You may paddle this one, if you like," offered June, holding the boat for his father to step in.

"You boys have so little on that you'd better do the work and keep warm. You might hand that steamer rug, Max, while you are about it. And do you mean to say you haven't stolen anything from the pantry? If I have a son and a nephew blessed with so little sense, it's high time I took them in hand!"

"Don't get excited, Father," June observed, as he pushed off from the pier. "Give us time to show what we can do in that line. Just keep calm."

"I like that!" Mr. Ralston retorted. "You disrespectful youth! I'm sure Max doesn't talk to his father in this style. Do you, now?"

An answering chuckle came from the bow where Max had been smiling over the dialogue. It sounded so strikingly like some of his conversations with Dad.

"Do I not?" he asked mischievously.

"I thought Rodney had probably brought his son up better than I have mine," sighed Mr. Ralston. "I don't know what this present generation is coming to, nor do I see any hope whatever for the next. When I was a boy, I never made such impertinent remarks to my honored parent."

"I'll bet my grandfather never 'sassed' you the way you do me!" retorted June.

"And I'll bet you and he weren't half such chums as you and June!" Max interrupted.

"There is that side of the question to be considered," said Mr. Ralston with a gravity that was not wholly mocking. "My son's attitude towards me appears painfully flippant on the surface, but the companionship goes pretty deep, eh, June?"

There came a light touch on Mr. Ralston's wind-blown hair as June's brown fingers swept it between two strokes of the paddle, but Max heard only a most matter-of-fact "Right you are! Let's hit her up!"

The bow paddle did "hit her up" with the result that the canoe began to cut through the water at racing speed.

"I see from this hole in the thwart that you've tried sailing," commented Mr. Ralston. "How did she go?"

"Like a breeze! The first time we got into no end of scrapes. We came down this end of the lake so Mother wouldn't be disturbed by our experiments. I'd be afraid to tell you how many times we were in the lake before things went smoothly."

"I knew you could swim and I supposed that Max could, or I should never have sent this canoe," observed his father.

"I should say Max could swim!" said June. "He's a regular fish. After we got her rigged, everything went all right and we were having a dandy time

just zipping across this stretch when suddenly we ran hard into a log floating below the surface. The shock knocked us both overboard, and the canoe filled, and the sail got waterlogged. We couldn't right her in such deep water and it was a stiff job getting her inshore. We put in a good morning's work. See this island, Father! This is the largest one. Max and I have spent several nights on it."

"June," interrupted Max eagerly, "wouldn't Uncle George be keen on our Baldface plan?"

"I'll interpret," said June wickedly. "I'm fairly clever now at understanding Max. Time was when I had to take Webster's Unabridged with me wherever I went — Max, if I couldn't throw water straighter than that, I wouldn't try! — Why, we want to camp on the mountain and see the sunrise, but Mother objected. It's queer, for she hasn't minded our staying on the island."

"I think Auntie has an idea that wild animals are on the mountain," put in Max. "But she won't object if you come, too, Uncle. We'll take blankets and it will be no end jolly."

"Sure, I'll come!" said Mr. Ralston promptly.

"Ah, what price Uncle George?" exclaimed Max, waving his paddle around his head.

"Just listen to the language he uses!" commented June. "That's not one of his most exclusive phrases either! You can see the lower end of the lake from

here. There is a wriggly, squirming passage through a swamp to another smaller pond."

"June's adjectives also apply to the mosquitoes!" Max volunteered. He had stopped paddling and sat with arms braced behind him on either gunwale. "It's a very decent passage, only stopped with pads."

"Choked with pond lilies," explained June with mock patience. "But right here is the deepest part of the lake. And where the hills come together there seems to be a set-back or cross-current. Sometimes for several seconds the boat doesn't move at all, and then suddenly it goes on again. The other night Nan and Hope were with me when it happened and they were quite excited. It's just as though a big hand came up from the bottom and clutched us for an instant. Nan insists that it is a water-kelpie or kraken."

"I shouldn't suppose there could be much current in so small a lake," remarked his father. "But that's probably it. Tired, son?" he added, noticing that his nephew's paddle was still idle.

Max turned with a smile, appreciating the affectionate address. "No, but unless we are going for lilies we usually take our swim off this point. I'll go in here, June."

Max kicked off his canvas shoes, and stood for an instant on the seat of the canoe, with arms raised above his head. Then, only slightly disturbing the

balance of the canoe, he dropped in a graceful curve headfirst into the lake.

"Wasn't that clean-cut?" asked June enthusiastically. "Max can do all sorts of stunts. He's teaching me, but I can't dive like that. You go ahead, now."

Being so much heavier than Max, Mr. Ralston's plunge rocked the canoe. June, with difficulty, saved himself from being capsized, and paddled in shore, where Max scrambled in to take him out for his turn.

Before long, Mr. Ralston tired of the sport and betook himself to the sun-warmed beach where he sat enjoying the fun the boys were having. Both were utterly fearless and thoroughly at home in the water. Max was a particularly expert swimmer and his lithe arms flashed out of water in the overhead stroke with the regularity of machinery.

"Who beats in a straightaway race?" asked Mr. Ralston as the two finally came ashore, dripping from head to foot, and tingling in every muscle with vitality.

"That depends," replied Max, gathering a store of apples from the stern of the canoe. "I can win a short race, but June has more staying power in a long one. I tire before he does."

"It's just a question of endurance," added June, luxuriating at full length in the warm sand. "If

Max hadn't been ill he'd probably beat me in that. He can do more now than when he first came."

"I hope he'll have more flesh on his bones before the end of the summer," observed Mr. Ralston, accepting the proffered apples and glancing from one boy to the other. As far as scanty bathing-suits revealed, both were tanned to an Indian brown.

"Of course I look skinny when I have so little on," said Max, "but I never was very stout, Uncle."

"If apples could make him fat, he'd weigh two hundred by this time," commented June with a sudden laugh. "I'll bet he's eaten a barrel of 'em since he came. He's a perfect apple fiend!"

"Don't you have them in Italy?" inquired Mr. Ralston.

"Very seldom, and never like these. We have stacks of oranges and medlars and grapes. I thought English apples were good, but these are better."

"He eats them all day long and part of the night!" June declared calmly. "The other afternoon we went over to the village. The mail wasn't in, so we had to wait. Max, as usual, had collected apples on the way, and his pockets were full of them. He laid them out in a row on the postoffice steps and began to eat. There were sixteen in all and an old farmer bet him a dollar he couldn't eat them at a sitting. Max said he could. Well, he ate and ate, and a whole crowd gathered to see him do it. The old codger who made

the bet began to look uneasy and finally grew pale. It got down to the fourteenth apple. Max ate that and then he ate the fifteenth. Everybody was roaring, but he stopped there and put the last one in his pocket and told the old chap he'd better not make such a rash wager again! On the way home, he finished the job."

"Couldn't you have eaten it at the time?" laughed Mr. Ralston.

"Yes, easily," Max replied, with a bright smile. "But I didn't want the old man's money. He didn't look as though he had many dollars to throw away, and I'd had my fun. Wouldn't this lake be a dandy place for skating!" he added with a sudden change of subject.

"What do you know about skating? — you child of a southern sun!" demanded his uncle.

"Oh, we go to Switzerland for the holidays!" said Max eagerly. "I've been at Mürren for five weeks in December and January. Everybody skates and skiis and slides on sleds called 'luges.' It's great! Mürren is in the high Alps, you know, and one can look up and see the Jungfrau like a white throne in the sky, and the Mönch and Eiger and half a dozen others. After breakfast it's a steady frolic until late at night. There are always some crackerjack skaters at Mürren. Of course, it's cold, but people dress for it, often in white from head to foot. Dad is keenest

on skiing, but he skates, too, and we have such sport. I do hope he'll get back so we can go this year!"

"Does Rodney take you wherever he goes?" asked Mr. Ralston, finishing his second apple.

"If he did, I wouldn't be here!" said Max rather wistfully. "It's the first summer, though, that I haven't been with him, and he always takes me when he goes to Switzerland for the sports. But when I was a kiddie, he was often away in the winter in places where he couldn't have me. I've stopped for weeks at a time with the Lisles or the Thornleys. I fancy that's why June finds me so English," he ended, laughing. "I've been so much with English people."

"You're improving," said June patronizingly.

"I'm not sure it is any improvement," Max retorted calmly, with a side glance at his cousin.

Mr. Ralston chuckled. "Max," he observed, "English or American, you're the right stuff! I expected to like you for your dad's sake, but I like you for your own! Now, isn't it time we went home? I've been 'comforted with apples' but I want my coffee."

"I'd like nothing better than to spend the morning here," replied June, stretching himself lazily. Max had colored at his uncle's words. He was greatly attracted by Uncle George, whose merry eyes belied a stern mouth. Max understood and admired that type of man, and from June's attitude toward his father,

it was evident that Mr. Ralston's friendship was worth having.

"June, get a move on!" commanded Mr. Ralston briefly as he started toward the water's edge. "It looks like a rather long tramp round this lake, but you'll have a chance to try it, young gentlemen, if you don't get into that canoe at once!"

There was a sudden flurry of sand, a wild scramble, and both boys were at the canoe before him.

"Did you speak of leaving us, Father?" June inquired blandly. "How long shall we wait for him, Max?"

"Doesn't Hope ever go in swimming with you?" Mr. Ralston asked as the paddles began to flash in the sunlight.

"Hope doesn't care so much for the water as she did last summer," June replied. "And then she was poisoned, you know, and she's only just got over that."

"She swims very well. I should think she would like some points from Max on diving."

"The girls don't care much for it, Uncle," said Max, coloring a little. "Charlotte and Anstice aren't allowed to bathe until the middle of the morning and Hope likes to wait and go with them. I did get Nan to dive once, but she wouldn't try it a second time. She said her eyelashes turned inside out and stuck into her eyes."

"It's odd that Hope feels that way," commented Mr. Ralston. "We must take her with us some morning."

Neither boy made any response, but the speaker, absorbed in the beauty of the morning, did not notice their rather marked silence.

Hope had been disappointed to find that her father had gone with the boys. Her plan was for him to take a dip with her and Molly, and her gloomy face attracted Mrs. Ralston's attention.

"I am sorry you are disappointed, dear. They would have made room for you, too, had they known you cared."

Hope's ill-temper was not wholly for the reason her mother thought. She made no reply, but arranged daisies and ferns in a glass for the breakfast-table. For almost the hundredth time, she eyed its simple appointments distastefully.

"How I do hate these dishes! And it does seem so — so *stingy* not to have a single servant!"

Hope did not really intend her mother to hear, but Mrs. Ralston looked up quickly.

"Daughter, do you know the reason why I didn't bring either cook or Susan down here this summer? It was wholly because I thought it better for you and June to have some daily household tasks. You have no time for anything of the kind during the rest of the year, and three long months of idleness in this

isolated place would be bad for you both. I saw it was confining to get all our meals, and that was why I decided to go to Mrs. Tyler's for dinner. But our simple breakfasts and suppers, with the slight work required to keep the house in order, can be a tax upon none of us."

Mrs. Ralston spoke more seriously than she often did, and Hope made no reply.

"Father and the boys will be hungry when they come," her mother added after a moment. "Ah, Molly is awake! Do you want to dress her?"

Hope went willingly. She was never impatient or unsympathetic with the little curly-headed sister, and the cloud on her face soon vanished before Molly's fascinating dimples and loving ways.

After breakfast, she overheard fragments of a conversation between Anstice and Max, who was splicing a fish line on the grassy bank below the window. She did not catch its beginning but her curiosity was sufficiently aroused to induce her to join them.

"Max, is there really a mystery?" Anstice was asking, while her blue eyes grew interested and excited.

"On my honor there is," Max replied, intent on his work.

"Where?" asked Hope.

Her cousin looked up quickly. He did not answer at once. "You know that point where we go to

bathe?" he finally asked. "Have you ever been ashore there?"

Both girls shook their heads. It was a sandy point, stretching sharply into the lake. Beyond the beach were huckleberry bushes, a fringe of higher shrubs and a few trees, before the slope of the hills began.

Max hesitated a second, a mischievous smile curling his lips. After the pause, he evidently made up his mind to go on.

"You remember about Captain Kidd and his buried treasure? That isn't the only mystery. June and I found one on that point."

"Is it a nice one?" inquired Anstice.

"That depends upon what you mean by 'nice.'"

"Where is it? Is it hard to find?"

"If you really wish to go, I'll tell you how, but you must be sure to follow directions minutely. You must go on a Friday morning between ten and eleven, and approach just as silently as possible. Land on the left side of the point and be very sure to leave the boat so that you can push off again in an instant; don't unship your oars. Remember, also, to leave them pulled in with the blades exactly parallel with the gunwales."

Max's eyes were dancing with amusement at the serious faces of the two girls.

"Step ashore with caution and be certain that your right foot touches land first. I couldn't answer for

the consequences if it happened to be the left one! Once on shore, follow the left edge of the point until you find a very narrow path. Every few feet you would better stop and listen for sounds of danger. Proceed in this way with the greatest care until you have on one side a small maple and on the other, a good-sized birch. At that point, you'd better turn back!"

"Oh, Max, go on!" urged Anstice, her eyes big with excitement. For a moment, Max would not yield to any urging, but he finally continued his directions.

"When you have the two trees in line, stop again to listen. Unless there is a grasshopper or a cricket chirping, giving it up at once as too perilous to be thought of. If you do hear a cricket, it will be safe to go on, though of course, two would be a better omen. Ahead, and just a little to the right, is a group of tallish bushes. Approach noiselessly till you judge you are within twenty feet, and then, proceeding from left to right, circle the clump three times, keeping at that distance from it. When you have finished the third circuit, listen again for the cricket, and if you hear it, walk with your forefingers crossed behind you, straight to the bushes and look in. There, you will see the mystery!"

"Oh-h, I shall certainly go," said Anstice excitedly. "On Friday, then, Hope!"

"You must remember all the directions," counseled mischievous Max. Anstice promptly rehearsed them.

"What can it be? Won't any day but Friday do?" she exclaimed when she had the nonsensical rigamarole at her tongue's end. "Oh, it will be such fun, but it's a whole week to wait!"

Hope turned away, half-interested, half-mystified, and not quite certain whether or not Max was really joking.

CHAPTER XIII

ROME AND RONALD

"OH, I suppose there is no reason why Hope shouldn't sleep on the mountain if she wishes, George!" sighed Mrs. Ralston. "But as a matter of fact, I don't believe she does want to; she only thinks she does!"

"That's true of many things on which we set our hearts," said Mr. Ralston merrily, "but Hope, like all the rest of us, 'wants what she wants when she wants it!' I wonder if Nan wouldn't like to keep her company."

"Oh, George, I beg of you not to suggest it! Nan will be wild to go, and her mother is so nervous that she wouldn't sleep a moment all night, conjuring up things that might happen. Sometimes I think it is fortunate that she doesn't get about very much nor know all the things her girls do with our children. In some ways she is a very sensible mother, but she couldn't endure this!"

"All right! We won't make Nan unhappy by suggesting it."

"Hope won't enjoy herself; she won't sleep well,

and you will have to stay near her, George, or she'll be frightened. I know she'd better not try it, and I almost wish she wouldn't, but I am willing, since she is so anxious to go."

"Hope doesn't seem quite her usual self," said Mr. Ralston, who was watching with interest the game of tennis in progress before the house. It was hotly contested, for Max and June were about equally matched, and both were in dead earnest.

"I don't know what is the matter with her," replied Mrs. Ralston. "At times, I have thought that she was a little jealous because June is so absorbed in Max, but Hope herself has Anstice and Charlotte. It seems best not to be too observant."

A shout went up from the tennis players, for Max, in a wild rush to return a ball, was unable to stop, lost his balance and went headfirst into a lilac bush. He picked himself out, quite unhurt but much dishevelled.

"That gives you the set!" he called good-naturedly.

"I had hard work to get it!" grinned his cousin. "Say, Max, did you think you could dive through that tough old lilac?"

"No, I thought it was a laurel and went to get some leaves to offer you!" retorted Max, vaulting the net with graceful ease.

"Is it really worth getting so warm over?" in-

quired Mrs. Ralston, smiling at the two as they dropped on the lower step, hot and breathless, with disordered hair and flushed faces.

"Oh, yes, Auntie!" exclaimed Max.

"Mother, that was a great set!" added June. "And it is only the third I've ever won from Max."

"Are you the champion at school?" asked Mr. Ralston.

Max looked up, tossing back his tumbled hair.

"No, indeed, Uncle! I can beat some of the boys, but I've never won a set from Ronald MacIvor. I've never beaten Mr. Thornley, either. I have won scattered games from both, but never a full set. Ronald has beaten St. George, though; he's the only fellow who has ever done that! We practise a great deal, for it is possible to play all winter in Rome."

"What is your specialty then?"

Max blushed. "I haven't any, Uncle George!" he said frankly. "You'd scarcely believe I could be the son of a man who does things with his brain that make half Europe sit up and pay attention! I can speak two or three languages decently enough to be of some use to Dad when we are traveling, but I'm not noted for doing anything particularly well!"

Uncle George smiled. Though gifts possessed by his brilliant father might be denied to Max, the fairies who presided over his cradle had not come empty-

handed. A happy, contented disposition and the power of making people like him, were a birthright not to be despised. Mr. Ralston's eyes had a very friendly expression as he made a brief comment.

"There are many people in the world who do nothing in particular, but do that very well. Some of them possess much fine gold in the shape of character."

"Max, how do you spend your time?" inquired his aunt. "You have never told us."

"Yes, give us an account of a 'day in modern Rome!'" said June. "I've meant to ask you before what you do with yourself."

"I'm a very busy person, Auntie!" began Max. "Dad and I have an apartment in a big hotel. It's just like living in a separate house, only our meals are served by the hotel. We have a little salon or reception room and a dining-room, and there's a big library besides Dad's study. Then there are three bedrooms and a bath. In the morning Giovanni comes and wakes me —"

"Who's he?" asked June.

"Haven't I ever told you about Giovanni? He's a great institution! Dad and I couldn't get on without him. Why, he's an Italian who's been with us ever since I can remember. He sees to the apartment, and orders the meals and pays the bills, and looks after everything in general. If you want any-

thing at all, from a motor-car to a quinine pill, Giovanni is the person to ask. He worships the ground Dad walks on, and he's rather fond of me, especially now that I've reached the age where he no longer has to wrestle with me on the subject of clean hands and fresh collars! I can remember going to Dad in a towering rage because I was sure Giovanni was injuring my health by washing me so much!"

"Max, that does sound extremely natural!" observed his aunt.

"The sentiment finds an echo in my own breast!" commented June gravely. "When I consider my own sufferings along that line — but go on!"

"It was comical when I was getting well in Jersey this spring," continued Max. "Uncle Dick's man thought he had plenty of time to do anything I needed, and Connie's old nurse had her feelings frightfully injured because they sent for a trained attendant instead of letting her coddle me, and Giovanni told Dad with tears in his eyes that much as he grieved to allow the *signore* to return alone to Rome, he simply could not leave the *signorino* ill and forsaken, at the mercy of those cold *Inglési* servants!"

"What did your father do?"

"Oh, Dad told Giovanni that he should stay with me, and Giovanni was tickled in stripes. It was genuine devotion on his part, for he doesn't speak

English and hates England. Still, Jersey wasn't so bad, for almost everybody there understands French, and Giovanni speaks that fluently. He isn't an ordinary servant, you know, and the care he gave me was the kind money can't buy. Giovanni is very devout and Aunt May told me afterwards that he went every day to the Catholic church and burned candles for me before the altars of the saints. She asked him if he thought they would intercede for me since I wasn't a Catholic. He looked quite distressed for a second and then replied: 'Madonna, the saints are very powerful, and I love the *signorino!*'"

"I think that was extremely touching, Max!" said Mrs. Ralston with quick sympathy.

"Aunt May thought it was," responded Max. "Giovanni is top-notch and no mistake! He's gone along to India now, so I'm not worrying over my dad. Well, to go back to Rome, I usually breakfast alone, for Dad hardly ever gets up before noon. I have only fruit and chocolate and rolls. After breakfast I look in to see if Dad's awake; he usually isn't. It's school until one, six days in the week — no holiday for us. I get home about half after one, and Dad tries always to plan so that we have luncheon together. After that, I invariably go out. If it rains, I go to a gymnasium, and on fine days, I have great fun. Sometimes I ride with Dad or Uncle Dick, and sometimes I go exploring with Connie and her governess, and very

often I go to the Borghese Gardens and play ball or tennis with the boys.

"Ronald is my chief chum, but there's a fellow named Louis Santo-Ponte whom I like tremendously. His father is Italian, but his mother is English. We have great sport together. It is tea-time when we stop playing and I always have my tea either with the Lisles or dear Granny Thornley. Then I go up to our rooms where Dad has usually come in and is dressing for dinner. Very likely he is dining out, but we almost always have an hour or so, and that is our especial time together. If Dad is going out, I sometimes have dinner with the Thornleys, or Aunt May will send word that she and Uncle Dick are going out and ask me to dinner with Connie and Mrs. Ferris. But often I dine entirely alone, and Giovanni waits on me as if I was the Prince of Wales! Dear old Giovanni! He's awfully good to me, but he's very particular about my manners, and though he's extremely respectful, I have to behave just as ceremoniously when I'm all alone as when we have guests. Dad entertains a good deal, but then he uses one of the private dining-rooms of the hotel and I'm not invited! However, he often has one or two guests in our own apartment, and Dad's guests are usually frightfully interesting. I enjoy that immensely, but the next day, I never know my lessons!" admitted Max with amusing frankness.

"I'm delighted when there are just a few guests and I may come to dinner. They are always men who've *done* things, you know, and I could listen to them all night. Where was I? Oh, after dinner, I study till I'm too sleepy to see longer and then I tumble into bed. One day is very much like another. Of course there are variations; sometimes for sins of omission or commission, I have to go back to school for an hour or so after luncheon, and sometimes Ronald or Louis comes to study, or I am with them. The days go so fast they seem like little smears. I have ever so many nice times," concluded Max with a smile, "for Dad's friends are perfectly dandy to me!"

"It doesn't sound like an idle or unhappy existence," said Mrs. Ralston.

"Max, you're the kind of boy who has a good time anywhere, aren't you?"

Max looked up inquiringly. Uncle George's eyes were smiling, but his question had been serious.

"Almost always," he replied. "June, I wish you and Ronald could know each other. Ronald is more sport! I've never seen any one just like him."

"He has a Scotch name," remarked Mr. Ralston.

"He is Scotch. His father is General MacIvor and there are two older daughters. Ronald is such a queer chap. He's very practical in some ways, but he's always imagining things and has wonderful projects

on hand. He can 'pretend' better than any fellow I know. He was tremendously interested in the liberation of Italy, and knew the details of all the battles and just worshipped Garibaldi. One while he had a picture of him in his room and used to burn candles and incense before it. He also wore a Garibaldi hat and was very low in his mind because he wasn't permitted to sport a red shirt!"

"He must be a circus!" grunted June.

"He is; but Ronald gets so awfully in earnest over these things that you don't know how to take him. Sometimes he is so wrapped up in one of his projects that he doesn't seem to have good sense! He will study and bone like mad over some one subject that pleases him and let everything else go to the dogs.

"Ronald and I were in Paris once," went on Max with a sudden smile. "We were allowed to go out alone together. We were about fourteen at the time. First we went to a shop and each bought a cane. Then we hired an open cab and drove all over Paris, leaning forward on our canes, pretending it was the French revolution and we were the aristocracy looking down on the populace!"

Mr. Ralston gave an amused laugh. "Didn't you enjoy it as much as he?"

"Oh, yes, Uncle, that was fun! But the next winter Ronald did something that got him into a mess. He decided that he would like to own slaves and that

he would buy an island off the coast of the United States where cotton could be raised, and have slaves and a plantation house. Of course, Ronald knew perfectly well that slavery doesn't exist in the United States and that the whole scheme was wild. He wrote to some land company in South Carolina and actually got into communication with a man who owned a sea island. Of course this took a long time, but Ronald put in all his extra moments in reading everything he could find about the southern United States and the cultivation of cotton, and in designing his plantation house. He had it all planned, with quarters for the negroes and everything complete. There were to be huge rooms and a marble swimming pool, and his favorite horse was to have a stall in the wing of the house where Ronald's apartments were. It was arranged that I should live with him most of the time, and we could not decide whether we should take turns supervising things, or engage an overseer."

"From where were your slaves coming?" inquired Uncle George, much entertained by the project.

"Don't ask me, Uncle! I think Ronald intended to import them from the coast of Africa! He actually carried on the correspondence with that man over here who thought him in earnest about purchasing the land, and it had gone about as far as it could when the catastrophe happened.

"One morning the servant who sorted the letters,

got them mixed and put one from this South Carolina man at General MacIvor's plate. His name is Ronald, too, so he naturally opened and read it and demanded an explanation. Ronald wouldn't explain; therefore he was shut in his room till he was ready to tell what the affair was about. I think at first, Ronald was too amazed to see that it was all up, and later — well, Ronald is Scotch, and he's General MacIvor's son, and he simply didn't think it was worth while to explain matters!"

"In other words, just plain stuffy!" commented June.

"That's about it. Ronald was locked up for two days and still he would not tell, so General MacIvor said he'd thrash him if he didn't. After due consideration, Ronald explained the matter so far as he was able to make it clear to his bewildered parent, who promptly gave him a licking for being such an idiot!"

"I think he deserved it!" declared Mr. Ralston.

"When I saw Ronald next, he was in the Borghese Gardens. He seemed unhappy and said he was looking for poisonous mushrooms! He told me he rather enjoyed being shut up on bread and water, for he pretended all the time that he was a prisoner in the Bastile. Neither did he mind being thrashed for obstinacy, but it hurt his feelings to be licked for being a fool!"

"Oh, Max, what a ridiculous story!" laughed his aunt, while June was holding his aching sides and Mr. Ralston was chuckling with amusement.

"That boy must be either a genius or an idiot!" he commented.

"Ronald told me that when General MacIvor saw the plans for the plantation house all drawn to scale, he grew perfectly purple in the face, and when he did speak, it was in language no gentleman should use before his son. Once, Ronald had an essay to write on a 'Day at the Seaside' and he couldn't write it till he got fairly into the seaside mood. So he partly filled the bath and put in some salt, and took off his shoes and rolled up his trousers and pranced up and down in the water to work himself to the proper pitch of enthusiasm. Ronald isn't really crazy, only he isn't able to attend to more than one idea at a time, and they take him desperately hard! I think that's the reason he does so well the things to which he gives his full attention. He is a crack tennis player and a perfect shark at mathematics. I'm awfully fond of Ronald, but I can't help seeing his funny side."

"Where is he now?"

"His last letter was from Scotland where he and his father had gone for the shooting. In it he outlined the constitution of a kind of Masonic order he is thinking of founding. He is going to make me Commander-in-Chief of all the United States branches

when they are federated. He had not been able to plan it as fully as he hoped, because the General seemed suspicious whenever he found him writing, but he should perfect the details this winter. The General is a brave soldier, but to get along with Ronald, one needs a sense of humor, and the old gentleman has absolutely none. I found that out when I once had a bit of a row with him."

"Tell us!" June commanded.

His cousin smiled. "It was several years ago, when I'd been sent to my room for some sin I'd committed — I forget now what it was. There was nothing to do, and after an hour or so, I grew decidedly bored. I looked from my window, and directly under it, saw Dad and two gentlemen who were having tea in the garden below. I was feeling rather annoyed with Dad, for he had refused to listen to my very plausible excuses and had sentenced me abruptly to solitary confinement. On the floor was a small leopard skin that had been given me by a friend of Dad's who is a famous African hunter. I'd always intended, when I had the time, to stuff that leopard and this seemed a good chance, so I pinned its edges together and rammed in a pillow. Of course its legs were limp, but the head was decidedly fierce and its eyes particularly glaring. When it was done I was rather pleased with it. There was also in the corner a ten-foot Arab spear that some one else had

given me, and I found some string and tied that leopard to the spear and carefully dangled it from my window. It was really effective for the limp legs didn't show much in that attitude.

"I lowered it slowly and cautiously through the tree outside, but as luck would have it, the string broke, and the leopard, after catching for an instant on a branch, flopped down directly on the table. There was quite a scene! Dad and one of the gentlemen sprang to their feet in a hurry, but the other, who was General MacIvor, tipped backward in his chair and lay sprawling on the gravel. The table went over with a crash and the leopard pitched into his face! It was rather a mix-up!

"Dad seized the leopard, for of course he recognized it after the first second, and he and the other gentleman began to laugh; but the General swore, and I didn't see what happened next, for I thought it prudent to get away from the window."

"What happened when Uncle Rod came upstairs?" June demanded as soon as he was able to speak. "Did little Max get a spanking?"

His cousin grinned. "It's lucky for me that my dad possesses a keen sense of the ridiculous! The only time he ever whipped me was once when I told him a lie, and of course he had to lick me for that. Oh, he came up and made some remarks and tried to appear shocked, but I knew all the while that he was

immensely amused. You see it really was an accident, for the string broke, and I never meant to let it go down on the table; I only intended to dangle it around in the tree. 'Little Max' apologized to those gentlemen and didn't have the leopard skin again for a few days. That was hard lines, because I usually took it to bed with me, and I missed it! The General was decidedly ungracious over the apology, and Dad afterwards said that he was furiously angry because he had been so startled. I fancy he did make rather a ridiculous picture flat on his back in the gravel, and a good many people saw him in that position! But, Uncle, are we really going up the mountain?"

"I'm with you, and I've just coaxed permission for Hope to go. Shall it be Blueberry or Baldface?"

"Blueberry!" agreed the boys with one voice. "But, of course, Hope's going!" June added. "Why shouldn't she? I won't go if she can't."

"Blueberry it is then! I wonder if we can hire a horse to take us to the foot of the mountain."

"I doubt it," said his son. "I never was in a place where the farmers were so unwilling to let people hire one. They say it is because of the bad roads and the danger of meeting automobiles, but it is a fact that they won't let you have one unless you promise solemnly to walk it up hill and walk it down hill and get out and fan it on all the levels!"

"June, you forget that at every cross-road one must offer it smelling-salts!" put in Max.

"I may be more successful!" declared Mr. Ralston. "It's six miles to the foot of the mountain and perhaps we would better drive. We will plan to walk back, but if it promises to-morrow to be a clear night, we'll see about getting Mr. Tyler to take us over."

"Look here, Mother!" exclaimed June. "Why not ask Mr. Tyler to take the hayrack? Then you and Molly and every one could go!"

"June, that's a bright idea," said his father. "We might start early enough so that all the girls could climb the mountain. We'll ask Mr. Tyler to go also so as to come down with Charlotte and Nan, and Mamma and Molly can nap on the hay. How's that, Helen?"

"We should enjoy it, shouldn't we, Mollykins? The girls would like it ever so much, George. The moon will be nearly full to-morrow and the drive home will be delightful."

"And Nan will be reconciled to returning if it is to be a hay-ride," said Mr. Ralston merrily. "That's a great suggestion and we'll surely carry it out. Well, June,— wherefore?"

He looked in amusement at his son, who had suddenly reached for a newspaper which he unfolded and ostentatiously arranged as a screen between his cousin and himself.

"Max is spooning with Mother at such a rate that it makes me blush!" replied June with a wicked grin.

"What is the proverb about people who live in glass houses? I know another boy who likes to be caressed!" protested Mrs. Ralston.

"Max acts as if he'd had some previous practice," June went on teasingly.

"I have!" acknowledged his cousin unexpectedly. "Aunt May often pets me, and as for Mrs. Thornley — why, since I grew too big to sit on her lap, Granny lets me hold her hand by the hour!"

"Bravo, Max!" laughed his amused uncle, while June groaned in comic dismay as he withdrew the improvised screen.

"I think, Auntie," said Max softly under cover of the rustling paper, "I never truly missed my mother until I had you. For I know you are like her!"

Mrs. Ralston's eyes filled. "How I wish you could have each other now! Edith would so love the dear boy her baby has grown to be."

Max kissed her hand impulsively in a pretty, foreign fashion, and turned to grin at his cousin, who was pretending to be deeply scandalized.

"Ready for another game?"

"In a moment. Tell us first if this is the way you conduct yourself with Uncle Rod?"

Max gave him a mischievous glance as he reached for his tennis racquet.

"With Dad? Oh, when I want to be affectionate with him, I chew his ears, and then he pulls my hair and tells me that I am a nuisance! Look sharp! This set shall be mine!"

CHAPTER XIV

BLUEBERRY MOUNTAIN

THERE was great excitement on the afternoon chosen for the hay-ride and mountain climb. The August day was a perfect one, not too warm and yet not chilly. Mr. Tyler, fortunately at leisure, was in a holiday mood, and Charlotte and Anstice were delighted with the prospect of a share in the fun.

Promptly at one o'clock, Mr. Tyler drove up to the Ralston cottage with the big rack and the stout farm horses. The rack was nearly full of springy hay, and over this he had spread and tied a big canvas, used in winter for protecting the ricks.

"How shall I ever get in?" Mrs. Ralston inquired in perplexity.

"June, bring a chair!" called Mr. Tyler, giving his hand to Hope, who climbed on the wheel, stepped on the top rail, and jumped down beside Anstice. "Just hand Molly to me," he added to Mr. Ralston.

Molly was tossed to the farmer, who caught her as if she were a bundle of straw, and in a business-like

way pitched her, squealing with delight, on the hay behind him.

June brought the chair, one of the side rails of the rack was removed and Mrs. Ralston made her ascent.

"Max, bring some cushions!" directed his uncle, and presently Mrs. Ralston and the girls were made very comfortable, seated flat on the soft canvas-covered hay with cushions at their backs. Luncheon, wraps and blankets were stowed away.

"Better take that chair along, June," said Mr. Tyler. "Your mother may want to get out while we're up the mountain."

"And I want my book!" exclaimed Mrs. Ralston. "You will be gone for some time."

Max ran back for it and for Molly's Teddy bear which she insisted should accompany them.

"All ready?" asked Mr. Tyler. "Get up, then, Billy! Move along, Lady!"

June and Max tumbled in at the rear of the wagon and the expedition started amid giggles and squeals of pleasure from the girls and Molly.

Recent rains had laid the dust and on that bright afternoon it seemed a delightful way to travel along the shady country road where the leafy tree tops almost met overhead, and occasional branches scraped the side of the rack and tickled one's neck. Then the road would wind through open spaces with sunny meadows and farm lands stretching away to woods

or water in the distance. There were comfortable looking houses, too, where Molly was on the watch for chickens, ducks or possible baby pigs. Their progress was not rapid, for the wagon was heavy, and as they approached the mountain the steep places became more frequent.

"I'd no idea that Blueberry was so high!" exclaimed Charlotte as the mountain seemed absolutely to overhang their heads. "How dark and black it looks!"

"It is higher than Baldface," replied Mr. Tyler. "Sailors coming in from sea raise Blueberry first of the shore hills."

"Oh, Mamma, I wish you could climb with us!" said Hope. "It is a shame for you and Molly to wait here in the rack while we are having supper on the mountain."

"Molly couldn't possibly climb so far, dear."

"Now, I think Mr. Ralston and I between us, could pack Molly if you'd like to go," said Mr. Tyler, turning a kindly, weather-beaten face from his horses. "There's places where she could walk, and it's nowhere so hard climbing as on Baldface. Except just at the top, there's a fair trail."

"Don't you want to try, Helen?" asked Mr. Ralston.

"I'd love to if it was just for myself, George, but it seems as if you had enough to take in the way of

blankets and provisions. And it means that Mr. Tyler would have to carry Molly all the way down."

"Molly doesn't weigh more than a couple of lambs and I've often packed them down Baldface. To be sure, I tie their legs together and hang them around my shoulders, but I guess Molly and I could hit it off pickaback. It does seem a pity for you to stop all that time at the foot of the mountain."

"Oh, Helen, do try!" begged Mr. Ralston boyishly and the young people added their entreaties.

"Max and I will carry all the lunch so you and Mr. Tyler will have only Molly to see to!" exclaimed June.

"We will divide things evenly," protested Mr. Ralston, giving his eager son an appreciative pat on the shoulder, while Charlotte avowed her intention of carrying her full share.

Mrs. Ralston gladly consented. Molly was delighted to be allowed to go with the "big children" and crawled through the bars at the beginning of the trail before Mr. Tyler had arranged at a near-by house for the care of the horses and rack. He looked the party over critically when they were ready to start to see if wraps and luncheon were fairly distributed.

"Come along, Molly Cottontail!" called her father. "This is good smooth walking through the pasture, and when your feet are tired, just wave them!"

Molly clasped his hand and pranced along with many unnecessary steps and flourishes.

For some distance after leaving the pasture they followed a rough cartpath through the woods. It was deep with dead leaves and ferns that in places almost obliterated it.

"It scarcely seems possible that we are going up hill!" observed Mrs. Ralston at length, for the rise was so gradual that it was hardly perceptible.

"There's lots of chopping done on Blueberry, and the horses need to have a fair trail out," replied Mr. Tyler. "We turn off before long and then the walking isn't so easy. Boys! Don't get too far ahead, and watch out on the left for a tree marked with red paint."

His warning caused a great sensation among the young people.

"Oh, Mr. Tyler!" exclaimed Hope. "Is the trail marked with paint?"

"If it isn't worn off. Four summers ago I blazed the way for the folks staying at our house."

"Don't tell us!" begged Anstice, dancing up to him. "Let us go ahead and find the path and only tell us if we go wrong; do, *dear* Mr. Tyler!"

"All right!" grinned the good-natured farmer. "I'll drop back with the old folks, but Nan, don't you get too far ahead nor go too fast."

The boys were equally pleased at the prospect of

looking for the blazes, but the first one was found by Hope. Some bark had been chipped by a hatchet stroke from a maple at the left of the trail and on the smooth face of the wood was a dull, red blur.

"Sharp to the left," called Mr. Tyler, "and look here, children, go slow! Mr. Ralston, you've packed Molly some distance,— swap off now with me. You're more used to city pavements, and I've run the ranges since I was a little shaver."

Molly's chubby arms were clasped around Mr. Tyler's sunburned neck, and with her on his back he followed the others into the woods.

A shout from Max indicated the second blaze on a big stone.

"What fun they are having!" said Mrs. Ralston, smiling. "The sport of finding those marks doubles their pleasure, Mr. Tyler."

"They won't find them all so easy, but it's no matter as long as they don't get too far ahead."

Mr. Tyler laughed as he spoke and presently they overtook the others all in doubt as to which of two faint paths should be chosen. The farmer came to a halt, smiling quietly.

"I see! I see!" shrieked Anstice, darting to the right. "It's on this fallen tree farther up! Most of the paint is covered by moss."

The rest followed and presently arrived at a clearing filled with stumps and branches chopped from trees

which had been hauled away for lumber. The whole opening was a tangle of raspberry bushes.

"You'll have to get around this as best you can," said Mr. Tyler. "This has sprung up since I was here last. The trail starts in again across the brier patch, so everybody for himself till we get over the other side. Nan, I wouldn't advise you and Hope to strike through — better go round the edges."

The girls turned back, but June and Max plunged ahead and were soon swamped in the tangle. The others caught glimpses of them at intervals, walking some fallen log. Mr. Tyler looked around reflectively.

"This is just the kind of place where bears like to come in berry season. I haven't seen one though for seven years. We do see deer for they are pretty plentiful. Well, if you should meet a bear, it would be hard to tell which would be the worst frightened, you or he. Indeed, Mrs. Ralston, the mosquitoes are more dangerous in this neighborhood!"

They skirted the raspberry patch and Charlotte found the blaze before June and Max had struggled through the clearing. They reported the rusty remains of a cook-stove.

"Yes, there used to be a cabin where the wood choppers holed up at night," replied Mr. Tyler, amused at their enthusiasm. "It burned a year or so ago. This young growth of maple, too, is new to me."

It was not difficult to make their way through the young wood, but it covered a considerable area, and some of the blazes had been cut away with the older trees. Here, the boys supplied landmarks by breaking branches.

At last they came to a wall of stone that seemed almost perpendicular, yet the path must lie in that direction, since on the face of the cliff shone the red blaze. Mr. Tyler looked at it critically.

"This is all there is of real climbing on Blueberry. Good for you, June! That's the way, from crevice to crevice! You get to the top and I'll stop on the ledge and lend a hand."

The ascent did not seem perilous with Mr. Tyler's iron muscles to help over the first difficulties and June beyond to steady one's footsteps. Molly nearly choked her father by the tightness of her clutch, but she did not scream nor appear frightened.

Mrs. Ralston and the girls safely on the top, Max handed blankets and packages of lunch and disdaining any aid for himself, scrambled up the steep rock. There was still some climbing before them, but it was not at all rough.

"Ah! I had been wondering why Blueberry was so called! I see now how it got its name," exclaimed Mrs. Ralston.

Bushes loaded with fruit covered the slopes below the mountain top, and progress was delayed for a

little. The sight of the last red blaze spurred the young people to climb over the rocks and come out on the very summit where a wonderful view stretched before them. Mrs. Ralston stopped with a comical wave of her hands.

"I wouldn't have missed this for anything! To think if it had not been for Mr. Tyler, I'd be sitting in the hay at the bottom of the mountain! Why, we must see fifteen miles out to sea!"

"All of that — nearer twenty-five," replied Mr. Tyler. "It is a sightly place, and I don't wonder the old fellows in Bible times liked to get up on a mountain top and pray."

To the east and the north lay the ocean and the river; to the west and south stretched lovely, rolling, wooded hills and higher mountains, valleys with shining lakes, isolated dots of houses, tiny, toy villages, and in the distance, two larger towns; all spread before them with a detail of beauty indescribable.

"Baldface looks like a mere ant-hill, and isn't our lake any bigger than that?"

June grinned at Charlotte's disgusted face. "It looks as though a good-sized stone would fill it. Doesn't Baldface seem like a sleeping monster?"

Nan regarded the mountain dreamily. "I think he *is* asleep," she observed, with her love for personifying natural objects. "When Baldface stretches and turns over, he will knock the lake quite out of

commission. Oh, goody! They're beginning to open the lunch!"

Mrs. Ralston laughed and looked up. "Come and help me. It seems almost profane to eat in face of such a view, but half our party has to get down again before dark."

Mr. Tyler had been wandering over the mountain top looking for a spring just below the summit. He called the boys to fill the empty water can, and drew Mr. Ralston aside for a moment's conversation.

When supper was finished, the sun was approaching the western horizon. It was a pity not to see it set, but in view of the descent through the darkening woods, delay did not seem wise. Mrs. Ralston kissed her family, Molly was attached like a limpet to Mr. Tyler's brawny back, and after being helped down the steep ledges, the party was swallowed up in the woods. For a little, they called back and forth to one another, but soon the voices and crackling of brush grew fainter and the four were left on the mountain top. Mr. Ralston gave a sudden exclamation.

"We mustn't miss the sunset, and we are on the wrong side! Hope, you have your sweater? Luckily, it isn't cold."

The sun dropped below the rim of the surrounding hills and the sky became red and yellow with streaks of molten fire. The earth turned a misty blue, and

shades of pink crept around the horizon. Down in the woods a hermit thrush began his evening psalm. The valleys darkened imperceptibly, and lamps shone from isolated farms. Villages began to twinkle, four lighthouses shot out their beaconing rays, and a blurred reflection showed where the larger towns lay. The water still seemed blue and pink, mirroring the clouds above, and suddenly around a headland, came a wonder; a brilliant, shining water-mystery, all light and silent motion. Seen in that setting, even the Bangor steamer became a thing of beauty.

The darkness increased and stars came out one by one. In the east appeared a heralding glow, and slowly the moon looked over the rounding earth. The beauty and silence were too impressive to mar by speech, but suddenly Hope grasped her father's arm. Directly into the path of radiance stretching from the half-risen moon, came a schooner under full sail. Like a silent ghost she passed, for one moment silhouetted against the golden background, and then vanishing into the darkness from which she came.

"One might sit here a hundred years and never see that again!" said Mr. Ralston, putting his arm around his daughter, who was nestling close to his side.

As the moon rose higher, the mountains assumed fresh aspects of beauty, their outlines again revealed by a softer light than that of the sun. Faint cloud

mists began to glimmer through the valleys and over the lakes.

Mr. Ralston had chosen a smooth grassy slope just below the eastern verge of the summit. It was sheltered, thoroughly dry and so situated that any restless sleeper could not easily come to harm. Beds of fragrant spruce boughs had been cut, and upon one of these Hope was rolled in a blanket. Her father tucked her in and lay down beside her. The boys bunked merrily together on the other side of the slope.

"Good-night, little girl; try really to sleep, and don't be frightened by any noises you may hear. All sorts of birds and wild things are awake at night."

"I wouldn't be afraid of anything with you so near!" replied Hope happily.

CHAPTER XV

A MIDNIGHT VISITOR

THE middle of the night was well past when June awoke. It was not a gradual rousing from slumber but a sudden start into full consciousness. He sat up, not knowing what had disturbed him and at the same instant realized that Max was no longer beside him.

The moon was sloping toward the western side of the horizon and many of the twinkling lights had disappeared from the wide vista spread below the mountain. There was the indefinable feeling that proclaims the hour after instead of before midnight.

June was puzzled and a little troubled by Max's absence. His departure had been so silent that it had not disturbed his bedfellow. As June looked about him in the bright moonlight he heard the crackle of a twig from the other side of the summit.

Reaching for his rubber-soled shoes, he slipped them on, dropped his blanket and silently climbed the rock above the grassy hollow. He could distinctly see his father and Hope, each rolled in a blanket and both apparently asleep.

Just over the summit, Max was standing on a high ledge, and looking intently to the west. He turned with a significant gesture as his cousin stole quietly to his side.

"Look!" he whispered, pointing down the slope to where the blueberry patches were thickest.

At first June saw nothing, only heard occasional crackles and rustles, indicating that something was afoot on the mountain side, but in a moment he distinguished a dark, moving mass slowly making its way through the bushes. It came fully into the moonlight, and its unmistakable poise and swing of the head showed that it must be a bear.

"Isn't that great!" whispered June.

Neither boy thought for an instant of being afraid. It was not a large animal and was wholly intent upon its own business of eating berries as it moved slowly along, apparently not seeing them. There was little wind, and what there was blew toward the boys.

"I'm going to wake Father!" said June, dropping silently from the ledge.

Mr. Ralston woke as June touched him, but his son laid a hand on his lips and made emphatic gestures of silence. He rose at once and followed to where Max still watched.

To all appearances, Bruin had no idea that there were invaders in his berry pasture; he browsed along in complete security.

"Mr. Tyler told me there were signs of a bear in the patch, but that they were never dangerous," said Mr. Ralston softly. "I didn't mention it for fear of frightening your mother. I'll wake Hope, for she won't have such a chance again in her lifetime."

Hope, roused from sound slumber, was inclined to think the benefit a doubtful one, but reassured by her father, she also crept silently to the point of vantage. For some moments they watched the bear curiously. He was clumsy in action, yet sure-footed and quiet. Suddenly he stopped, sniffed at the ground and gave a snort that made Hope jump.

"I think he's struck our trail," whispered Mr. Ralston. "He has edged over to the side where we came through."

Bruin showed signs of uneasiness; he nosed sharply about; moved through the bushes with more determination and was apparently investigating this invasion of his own special mountain top. Finally, with a rattle and scratch of his claws on the stone, he climbed the farther side of the ledge where the party was watching. He was distant fully seventy feet, but at this sudden move, Hope grasped her father's arm. As she did so, her foot dislodged a small stone, which crashed to the rock below. The bear wheeled and shot away with incredible agility. Still, it did not appear that he had actually seen them, for at the farther edge of the blueberry patch he stopped, looked

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back, and rose on his hind legs the better to view the unknown cause of his fright. He made a curious and interesting picture silhouetted against the moonlit sky, paws hanging at either side. Then he dropped abruptly to all-fours and the next instant had vanished from the face of the mountain.

The boys were wildly excited by this adventure. Hope, too, was prepared to detect a bear in the slightest sound and even Mr. Ralston felt wakeful and unable to rest. Occasional chuckles and whispers from the other side of the slope showed that June and Max were in no mood for further slumber. Soon the birds began and after that no one could sleep. There was a medley of chirping and twittering before the full orchestra tuned up with the hermit thrush as chief soloist, seconded nobly by a brown thrasher; a whole chorus of warblers and vireos, with a cuckoo for the drum and cymbals.

Then the sun rose, a sight second only to its setting. There came a faint glow in the east, heralded by the birds; the light of the moon lessened, and things began indefinably to take on a more distinct form. The brightening glow stole around the horizon; a few floating clouds showed their silver linings; it seemed as though the whole earth wakened from slumber and opened its eyes for another day. Little by little the light grew, seeming to radiate from every direction.

"Still, I don't care for it as much as for the sunset," Hope said to her father. "It isn't as mysterious. Anything one can imagine might happen after the sun goes down, but it begins to be prosaic when you can see everything."

"Don't be poetical, Polly Anne!" teased June.

Hope smiled, but turning, caught a glance from her cousin. Something in his face made her think that he understood exactly what she meant. Nor was it the first time the suspicion had been forced upon her that Max appreciated her fancies where June only poked fun.

"If we were really camping, we'd have a frying pan and do some cooking instead of munching cold boiled eggs and sandwiches," said Mr. Ralston, when they had completed their scanty toilets and gathered for breakfast.

"I feel very unwashed and not quite dressed either," said Hope. "But, oh, it has been such fun! And to think we've seen a bear! Won't the girls be interested!"

"Uncle, do you suppose we could trail him?"

"I doubt it, Max. Some one who was used to hunting might do so, but why not let him alone? Apparently that is all he wants and what harm does he do on this uninhabited mountain top? I'd like to trail him just for the chance of getting a photograph but it would be only by a miracle that one could be

secured, for I imagine he comes out only at night. Haven't we had a good time? Has it been as much fun as you expected?"

"More!" declared both boys with unanimous enthusiasm while Hope hugged her father and protested that she would be broken-hearted to have missed it. He laughed and looked at her teasingly.

"And you're not sleepy or tired?"

"I do feel queer, but that's because I haven't had my clothes off, nor slept so very much. I shall have a rest this afternoon and it's been the most fun of my life!"

They waited to see the sun well above the horizon; explored the whole mountain top; added a cairn to those already there and after an ineffectual attempt to follow the bear for a short distance, collected their things and prepared to go down. The ledge was simpler in the descent than the ascent and the long trail through the growth of young trees was easily traced by aid of the broken branches. In the edge of the raspberry patch, Max found a wide scarlet ribbon floating from the bough of a small maple.

"Charlotte had that on her hair; Nan's was brown," said Hope, glancing at it. "You'd better untie it, for she's lost almost all she has."

Still a little farther down the trail they found three feathers stuck erect in the path; later a pile of pebbles and a number of twigs arranged in a fantastic figure.

It was evident that the girls had taken great pleasure in thus indicating their downward progress.

Once out in the wider cart road, Mr. Ralston drew June back.

"Look here, son," he said, putting his arm across the boy's shoulders; "will you be terribly disappointed if I take Mother off for the last week of my vacation?"

June gave him a quick, inquiring glance. "Why, I hate not to have you for all the time, but I won't be piggish about it."

"You see," went on his father, "I want her to have a little change from Molly this summer. From here, it's very easy to get into Canada, and I've been thinking that I'd like to take her there before I go back. We went when we were first married and it would be pleasant to go again. For some reasons I want to take you all, but that would partly defeat the purpose of the trip. I really can't kill off Molly so she won't be in evidence for a week! It doesn't seem just fair to take you and Max and leave Hope behind to take care of Molly, so if you are willing, I think Mother and I will go by ourselves. You and Max get along so well together, and Molly is devoted to Hope — do you think you can manage for a week?"

"Of course, Father! Nothing can happen to us, and I'll take care of the girls."

"I know you will. But, June, promise me that

you won't do any unusual stunts, like this sleeping on the mountain for instance."

"Honor bright! I hope you and Mother will have a dandy time. It will be good for her to be away from Molly for a little," June responded cordially.

"I knew I could count on my boy! June, I'm tremendously glad you are having this summer with Max. He certainly is his dad's own son!"

June gave his father's arm an affectionate squeeze. "Max is going to Yale and we are going to room together. I think it's great that he's coming to an American college. In a way, it's lucky that he was ill last winter, or he'd be ready a year ahead of me. He said, though, that Uncle Rod wouldn't let him enter until he was eighteen, even if he was ready."

"I never supposed Rodney would send his boy anywhere except to Yale. That's great, June! I hope the plan of chumming together will materialize. Rodney and I were staunch friends long before we married sisters. Nothing will please me more than to have you and Max as intimate."

Hope had dropped back and was waiting for them, her face flushed and her expression annoyed. Her cousin had sauntered slowly on alone.

"What's the matter, little daughter? Tired?"

"Not much, but Max is so provoking!" Hope replied rather crossly.

"Bless me! You don't mean to say that you are

easily teased after spending all your life with June and me? It must be time to take a rest. Max, we'll call a halt."

Hope sat down on the fallen tree her father indicated, but she did not look any more amiable, and Max spent the interval wandering in the woods. When they started again, the box he carried was nearly full of edible mushrooms.

Just at nine they came through the pasture and stopped for water at the farmhouse by the foot of the mountain. They dropped their burdens and clustered around the well, where the farmer's wife came out to greet them and tell of the safe descent of the others and how they started homeward as soon as the horses were harnessed, Molly asleep on the hay and the girls very happy over their successful climb.

"They said they should be down the road to meet you," she added, watching them gather their things preparatory to beginning the six-mile walk. Hope, as she reached for her sweater, accidentally jerked Max's box of mushrooms from the curb, scattering its contents far and wide.

"Oh, bother!" she exclaimed impatiently. "How I do hate these old toadstools! I wish you'd stop bringing them home, Max!"

"They're not toadstools and they are very good," retorted her cousin, but as he spoke, he flung the handful he had collected to the fowls in the barnyard.

"Sis, do cut it out!" interrupted June with a glance of annoyance. "You're the only one who doesn't like mushrooms."

"Those hens will all be dead when Max sees them again!" Hope retaliated. "I'm not going to be poisoned, too!"

Max tossed a second handful over the fence, kicked the empty box into the woodshed and without a word turned to swing into step with his cousin, leaving Hope to join her father, who had strolled to the gate, beyond hearing of the little controversy.

Laden with blankets and sweaters, they found the walk home both long and warm. Beautiful views on either side made the way seem less weary, and occasional stretches of shaded road were a pleasant contrast to the sunny spaces. In one of these tree-arched hollows, June indicated a colony of mushrooms, but his cousin only shook his head and walked steadily on.

Hope kept pace with her father, who was explaining his plans for the trip to Canada. He was surprised that she seemed less willing and unselfish than her brother.

"I don't mind taking care of Molly," she said ungraciously, "and of course I want you and Mamma to have a good time, but — the boys!"

"They will do nothing they should not, and you're not in the least responsible for them. Molly will be

your only charge, and it will be over a week before we go. Many nice things may happen in a week!"

A mile and a half from home, Charlotte and Anstice hailed them. They were sitting on a big log, provided with a paper bag of Mrs. Tyler's fresh doughnuts sprinkled with delicious maple sugar.

"I never ate anything so good!" exclaimed Max as he finished his.

"I knew Mrs. Tyler was making them, for I smelled them," said Charlotte, "so we looked in the kitchen window to see whether she'd invite us to have any, and she asked if we were going to meet you and then gave us one apiece for everybody. They are most remarkably good."

"We are glad you looked in the window," said Mr. Ralston gravely.

Anstice laughed. "We tried to look hungry, but we couldn't agree about the best expression to indicate it. I wanted to open my mouth wide, but Charlotte thought looking very wistful would be better."

"Nan didn't have any expression to speak of; she only looked silly! We started early and picked ever so many wild blackberries."

"Yes, and we found a stove-bird's nest," remarked Anstice.

"A what?" inquired Mr. Ralston, somewhat bewildered by this new and startling term of ornithology.

"She means an oven-bird," explained Charlotte

patiently. "The other day she called an indigo bunting a blueing bird!"

"What's the difference?" interrupted Anstice. "I knew it had something to do with a laundry! But tell us about the mountain. Was it fun?"

Hope, June and Max all began at once and Mr. Ralston listened with amusement to a tale in which the bear figured fully as large as life, involved with sandwiches, blueberries and the ship in the moon, but Hope alone spoke of the sunset, the stars and the hymn of the hermit thrush.

So much to relate made the rest of the way seem short and it was a surprise to come so soon upon Mrs. Ralston and Molly waiting at the last turn.

"A bear!" exclaimed Mrs. Ralston when the story had been told for the second time. "George, you can't mean it! Aren't you joking? I shouldn't have slept a single instant had I known Mr. Tyler saw traces of one!"

"That's exactly why I didn't tell you!" replied Mr. Ralston.

CHAPTER XVI

MR. LEMON HAS A CALLER

CHARLOTTE had been to the village to post an important letter and was sauntering slowly homeward along the pasture path. It was narrow and winding, leading sometimes across open, sunny areas, sometimes through thickets, and in one part that she liked especially, through a maze of small white pines.

There were hundreds of them, growing without order or arrangement, in places so thickly that one must really struggle through their branches, and in others, enclosing warm, sunlit spaces, carpeted with short grass and roofed only by the blue sky.

Charlotte loved the pine maze, and frequently when it was too windy to sit elsewhere in comfort, would take refuge in one of these dells, quite sheltered by the dense growth. To-day she followed the crooked path to one of her favorite spots. As she entered, she caught sight of a familiar figure.

Max had been lying flat on his back, but hearing soft footsteps, he sat up and looked through the pines. The blue skirt and white sailor blouse might belong to

any one of the three girls, but only Charlotte, who was subject to headaches, habitually wore a hat. Its conical crown showed for an instant over a low pine, and Max paused in his meditated retreat. The next moment Charlotte hailed him.

"What's the matter?" she inquired after her first greeting.

Max did not answer and Charlotte dropped to the ground. She had never before seen Max either angry or unhappy, but now he looked as if he were both.

"Tired? Hungry? Want to go home?" coaxed Charlotte.

Max shook his head at the first and second questions, but at the third, he smiled.

"What's the matter? Come, tell me! You'll feel better then. Do you really want to go home?"

"Perhaps, but I suppose I'll get over it," admitted Max, breaking a twig into bits. Charlotte on her knees, with the wind blowing tiny winsome curls about the brown face framed by the red Mexican hat, was very sweet and persuasive, and Max was mortified and indignant.

"Has somebody been horrid to you?" she asked, settling into a more comfortable position.

"Oh — probably not!" replied her companion. "Carlotta, were you around that morning when I was jollying Hope and Nan about the mystery on the point where June and I go to dive?"

Charlotte shook her head.

"I thought you weren't, but I wish you had been, for I can't see how any girl in her senses could have thought me in earnest. It seems they poked around till they found it and then went into fits. I gave them such fool directions that any idiot would have known I was joking, but instead of taking it as I meant, they bolted, and Uncle George has called me down hard for playing a practical joke on them and frightening them so."

"Why, but they weren't frightened!" exclaimed Charlotte. "Did they say they were?"

"No," Max answered. "Auntie and Uncle and I happened to be on the lawn when the girls came, both dripping wet. Auntie hustled Hope in to change, and Nan went directly home. Hope only said that when they saw the skull they were startled and ran without looking where they went and fell over the bank into the lake. She *was* crying, but I think it was just because she was annoyed at tumbling into the water. But Uncle George thought she'd been frightened, and so he came down on me."

"Didn't you explain that it was all a joke?"

"No, of course I didn't! If Uncle chooses to think I would do so mean a thing as deliberately plan to frighten a girl, he's perfectly welcome to do so. What he thinks is a matter of complete indifference to me!"

Charlotte could not help laughing at this absurd declaration, scarcely tallying with the mood in which she had discovered Max. But in spite of the obstinate line in which his lips were set, his defiant independence was whimsically attractive.

"Oh, stuffy!" she remarked at length. "But if you won't explain, don't blame Hope."

"Hope's opinion also is nothing to me!"

Charlotte shook her curly head at this reply. "Oh, well! if the little boy *wants* to be a martyr —" she teased.

Max made no response, but continued to dig a hole in the turf beside him. After another amused glance, Charlotte began to sing mischievously.

> "'He's going to be a martyr
> On a highly novel plan,
> And all the boys and girls will say
> Oh, what a nice young man!'"

Charlotte paused to note the suspicious curves appearing at either corner of Max's mouth. "'*Oh — h,* what a nice young man!'" she repeated softly.

Max threw away his improvised spade, suddenly gave himself a resounding slap on the side of his face and turned with a smile.

"No good my posing with angel wings when I haven't them, Carlotta, and no use pretending I don't care about Uncle's wigging, because I do!"

There was something so charming in the impulsive boyish gesture and frank acknowledgment that Charlotte smiled in response.

"You might have explained," she repeated. "They weren't frightened, for they couldn't agree whether it was the skeleton of a cow or a horse, and Nan, wet as she was, ran back to see whether there were any horns. Afterwards, Mr. Tyler said it was a horse that was drowned when they were cutting ice one winter. And as for falling into the lake, it wasn't either deep or cold and getting wet doesn't hurt anybody."

"Quite my own opinion!" Max replied, now patting his head most approvingly. "Stop laughing, Carlotta! I need sympathy."

"I can't help laughing when you're so ridiculous. I'm sorry your uncle called you down, but truly, it was your own fault if you wouldn't explain. Hope —"

Charlotte paused. Max no longer looked stubborn, only serious. Where he had struck it, one cheek was scarlet, and Charlotte smiled again as she noticed the mark. But how would Max take what she wanted to say?

"What about Hope?" Max inquired, looking up. "Were you thinking she'd be sorry that Uncle sailed into me? Not much, Carlotta!"

Max could scarcely have spent his childhood in

Italy without acquiring that expressive shrug of the shoulders peculiar to all Latin races. The gesture with which he ended his sentence interested Charlotte, who enjoyed his occasional odd tricks of speech and quaint mannerisms that spoke of an experience so foreign to her own. In most respects Max resembled any well-bred American boy, but he was possessed of a certain poise and a graceful courtesy not frequent in a lad of his age, while the possibility of his saying or doing something unexpected lent a charm to every word and action.

"Hope isn't always nice to you," Charlotte began slowly.

"Always?" interrupted Max. "The next time you notice Hope being nice to me, just call my attention to it, will you?"

"Now listen a minute," said Charlotte, hesitating no longer. "It really disturbs me to have you two act the way you do. Don't interrupt," she added, as Max seemed about to speak. "I don't understand any more than you, but I think you're both missing a good deal. Hope *is* nice, Max, only she bristles so when she's with you. With Nan and me, she's just as different, so bright and clever and full of fun. Of course, we didn't know her before this summer, but June says that always before, Hope went everywhere with him, tramping and fishing and doing the things he did, and now, she won't be chummy. And

you can't deny that when you're together, you and she are always scrapping."

"Who begins the scrap, Carlotta?" Max demanded, looking at her mischievously.

"Oh, Hope!" was the prompt acknowledgment. "But you're a good second. And when you don't scrap, it's even worse because then you're as stiff as ramrods. I don't understand what the trouble is, for I know you both well enough now to be sure you'd really like each other if you'd only try."

"Now, Carlotta," began Max, "let me tell you one thing right here. I honestly wanted to be friends with Hope, but she wouldn't. I don't thrust my friendship on any girl. I know girls can be dandy comrades! But as for Hope! Thank you, no more for Maxfield!"

"But you might try," Charlotte protested.

"Angels couldn't help being provoked with Hope, and I told you just now that my pinions hadn't even started to grow."

"I know they haven't!" agreed Charlotte, "but this does seem such a pity. Why don't you ask Hope point blank what the trouble is?"

"Because I don't care enough about having her for a friend," replied Max frankly. "If she was a different sort, I would in a minute. Now Connie and I always clear up our rows most promptly, even if they end in our pulling each other's hair. But I was

in earnest when I said that Hope's opinion was nothing to me."

"She's your cousin," said Charlotte gently, "and you'd care if you really knew her. Hope isn't as prickly as she seems. She's lovely with her little sister."

"She is sweet with Molly," admitted Max. "Look here, how long is this going to last? I've had one wigging already this afternoon and I don't like being pi-jawed any better than the next fellow. When's the curtain coming down?"

"Right off, since you won't be good," sighed Charlotte, smiling in spite of herself. "Only I'm sorry. I think you're rather stubborn."

Max responded with a graceful and deprecating wave of both hands. "Carlotta *mia,*" he remarked solemnly, "you may use all the adjectives of that nature you can think of. If English fails you, I'll willingly supply a choice selection of forceful synonyms in other languages. I'll listen to the entire list very meekly and say, 'Yes, that's me!' *But — !*"

The sentence ended in another expressive gesture.

"Max, I'm afraid you're hopeless!" observed Charlotte, wondering for the fiftieth time how Hope could remain so persistently indifferent to her cousin's winning personality.

"Oh, not hopeless, Carlotta!" Max protested quickly. "Even the people who know me best enter-

tain a faint expectation that I may improve some day! But why isn't this a good time for us to go and see Mr. Lemon?"

"It does seem to be. The most difficult part is to get away without being asked where we are going and here to begin with, we are off by ourselves. I wonder what the others are going to do this afternoon?"

"They were calling me a while ago but I wouldn't answer," said Max with a mischievous smile. "Afterwards I wished I had because I don't want Uncle to think me sulky as well as stuffy. It was kiddish to bolt this way but I had to let off steam. Shall we go?"

"Yes, I think it is a good chance," assented Charlotte, rising to her feet. "Can't we go down through the pines to the road? We sha'n't strike that swamp where Mr. Tyler said we must never go, shall we?"

"No, for the swamp lies off to the east. It will only be rough walking."

"I don't mind that," said Charlotte, vanishing as she spoke into the thick pines at the western side of the clearing.

Going through the evergreens was like making their way through a green sea, for the young trees had no dead branches and were so soft and supple that they could easily pass among them, enjoying the touch of aromatic needles and boughs. The sun intensified their fragrance, filling the air with sweet odors of pine.

Among the rocks and bushes of the lower pasture progress was harder. Charlotte looked askance at a flock of meek sheep industriously cropping the short grass of the rougher ground, but they offered her no violence. Once on the road the climb was uphill with a fine view over the lake to the surrounding mountains.

"There's the canoe and the boat! They've all gone down the lake," Charlotte remarked as they stopped to gaze across the water.

"Molly and Auntie and Uncle in the boat and June in the canoe with the girls," said Max, looking down on the boats that seemed mere toys in the distance. "I say, Carlotta! I ought not to have talked so about Hope! I wish I'd held my tongue! I'm ashamed of myself! And it *was* kiddish not to answer."

Charlotte smiled. "You didn't say anything very dreadful and I'll never speak about it. And if you had answered, we shouldn't be calling on Mr. Lemon. Here's the path. I'll sit on the wall until you come back."

Charlotte found a comfortable seat and settled herself to watch the progress of the boats far below. The sun was already dropping toward the top of Baldface and the shadows were long. All around, clumps of goldenrod heralded the coming fall.

Max followed the winding path until he came in sight of the cottage. It was just as he had last seen it, forlorn, forsaken, with the high grass growing to

its very walls, and that gloomy tombstone against the closed door. It seemed not inappropriate as a memorial of two wrecked lives.

He approached slowly, whistling as he went, in order to warn Mr. Lemon. As he drew near the house, the old man looked suspiciously from the door, ready to retreat and bar the way if need be, but there seemed no cause for apprehension in the appearance of the tall, handsome boy.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Lemon."

The old man looked at him fixedly, but made no reply.

"Some weeks ago, I came down the mountain and was caught in a shower. I stopped under your shed as perhaps you remember. I lost a little pin that day, and I thought it might have fallen in the sawdust. You didn't see it, did you?"

The old man shook his head, never once removing his gaze from his visitor.

"It was of no value, only I was sorry to lose it, for it came from France."

There was no change in the expression of Mr. Lemon's face, and Max was disconcerted at the apparent failure of his trump card, but after a pause a harsh voice issued from the dingy beard.

"You been to France?"

A bright idea struck Max. *"Oui, Monsieur Lemoine!"*

At the sound of the French words and the old-time pronunciation of his name, the man's features underwent a change. They trembled; the fixed expression of the eyes altered; and for a fleeting moment, the face of young Pierre Lemoine looked from that of old Pete Lemon. Max was startled at the brief apparition, but it vanished in an instant.

"Ah, you speak the French!" said the rough, harsh voice, clipping and abbreviating words that were themselves uttered in a Canadian patois. Had Max spoken the language less readily, he could not have grasped the torrent of words that followed. As it was, he understood three-quarters and guessed at the rest.

Charlotte, on the wall, waited patiently while the shadows grew still longer and the toy boats on the lake turned into black specks and then vanished. Still, Max did not come. The shadow of Baldface stretched farther out on the water; it had nearly reached the center. The canoe suddenly reappeared on the western side of the lake, and then, some distance behind, she saw the boat.

Charlotte was beginning to feel uneasy when Max returned. His cheeks were flushed and his expression animated.

"Did you think I was never coming?" he called.

"I was afraid that dreadful old man had done something to you."

"Why, Carlotta, he hailed me as a friend and

brother! We've been jabbering French like a couple of natives," said Max excitedly as he came from the path.

"You can tell me on the way home," answered Charlotte, sliding from the wall.

"I started in as I planned," began Max as he swung into step, "and he caught on when I spoke of France. Then it occurred to me to try talking French, and, Carlotta, he simply opened up! I believe that all these thirty years he's been thinking Canadian-French! It was mostly about his early life in Quebec and how he hated this place and all that. But, Carlotta, he did say one thing that was odd. In a way, it wasn't any queerer than all he was spouting, but somehow it struck me as being *true*. He described some forest land in the wilderness beyond the Saguenay river and said that a Monsieur Marshall for whom he had acted as guide, bought an estate there and gave him the deed of this especial part. He told me the exact number of acres it contained and its boundaries; how one corner was marked by a big beech and another by a boulder, and so on. It was something he must have known familiarly some time or he couldn't have described it in such detail. And it is perfectly possible that some rich man did give it to him, if he'd been a satisfactory guide. He said Mr. Marshall told him to keep the deed, because some day the land would be valuable."

"Isn't that interesting!" Charlotte commented. "Do you suppose he has the deed? Has he ever done anything with the property?"

"I asked, but he grew excited and it was hard to understand when he talked so indistinctly. As far as I could make out, he gave the deed to his wife to keep and she has it."

"How can she when she's been gone all this time?" asked the puzzled Charlotte. "I don't imagine she knows anything about it. Probably it's round the house somewhere."

"But he evidently thinks she took it. Do you know, Carlotta, the story rang true to me. Perhaps he really does own some land that has become worth ever so much money."

"Don't deeds get outlawed or something?" Charlotte inquired doubtfully. "Thirty years is a long time!"

"I don't know," Max acknowledged frankly. "But when we find Kitty we can ask her all about it. I let him talk as long as he liked, because I thought it would ease his mind. He didn't show any interest when I led up to the French nuns, and I wasn't sure I was wise to mention them. But he sat up and listened when I spoke of this Mrs. Lemoine in Jersey, but still he didn't say anything, even when I told him that she had a daughter. I was a bit disappointed at that, but finally I explained to him all about Sister

Angélique and her mother. Oh, then he was excited!"

"But, Max, do you think you'd better have told him so much? Won't he be terribly disappointed if there is any mistake?"

"It seems as if it must be true, and he was ever so interested. I told him about the letter I wrote. I'm not sure that I made him understand everything, for he spoke this patois and his voice was odd, so that I couldn't catch all he said. But, anyway, he took in enough so that when the answer comes, it will be all right."

Charlotte was silent for a moment, not entirely sharing this expectation. There seemed to her a number of opportunities for misunderstanding, but on second thought she kept her doubts to herself.

"It's very interesting and I hope it will come out as we'd like," she said at length. "If it does, Mr. Lemon will certainly consider you as his patron saint."

Max suddenly turned and looked at her. "To be sure!" he exclaimed. "Why, I'd quite forgotten that before I came, I promised Dad to behave like a plaster saint this summer. How well I've been doing it!"

"That's a funny thing to make you promise! But were you doing it this afternoon?" Charlotte added saucily.

"As I recall the promise it was wholly voluntary on my part. This afternoon? Now, Carlotta, did

you ever meet a graven image with a stiffer backbone than I was displaying to both you and Uncle?"

"Oh, Max!" remonstrated Charlotte.

"Once, when I was quite a kiddie," Max went on, smiling at her amusement, "I grew rather daffy over Francis of Assisi and naturally took the good *frate's* rules of life quite seriously. So one day when I'd gone to the Borghese Gardens with Connie and her governess, I wandered away from them and met a street gamin about my own age,—nine or ten. I proposed to him that we should exchange clothes, *à la Fra Francesco!* He agreed with alacrity and we retired to the shrubbery to complete the affair. Presently I saw my white knickers departing on his person and was left with but two extremely dirty and ragged garments as a sole protection against an observant world. Oh, they were impossible, even to the muddle-pated kiddie that I was! I hadn't realized that, you see. But one really can't promenade the streets of Rome with no clothes at all, so I put them on at last. I didn't dare show myself to Mrs. Ferris but bolted for home. At first the *concierge* didn't recognize me and ordered me out, but when he realized who I was, he nearly fainted on the spot. When Giovanni beheld me, his eyes stuck out and his hair stood on end with pious horror. He burned those garments immediately, scrubbed me from top to toe with carbolic soap,—and you can bet I howled

with rage,— put me to bed and only awaited Dad's arrival before sending for a doctor."

"What happened then?" Charlotte giggled. "Did your father punish you?"

"No," Max answered gayly. "When Dad heard the story, told as only Giovanni could tell it, he exploded with laughter, and that completely finished Giovanni. Dad had first to assuage his injured feelings. Then he hugged me and said he didn't believe that to-day it was possible to apply literally the principles of conduct laid down by a saint who died some hundreds of years ago. He thought even sweet Brother Francis might find it necessary to change his tactics if he should come back to earth and try to reform the society of the twentieth century!"

"Your father must be very nice!" commented Charlotte appreciatively but she was also thinking that her companion must have been a most lovable little boy.

Max gave her a quick glance. "My dad is without doubt the best ever! But about the saints,—" he continued after a slight pause. "Somehow I was rather prejudiced against Francis after that experiment. I felt that he hadn't proved himself equal to the occasion. Then Connie and I found a little French story about St. Joseph. He's the saint the girls pray to when they want a husband. Wouldn't it be interesting to be his plaster image in a church

and hear what kind of husbands they asked for?"

"I think it would be quite an experience!" Charlotte agreed.

"Well, in this story the girl made a *neuvaine* to St. Joseph. That is, she prayed for nine consecutive days that he would send her a husband. Nothing happened. Then she fired his image out of the window and hit a man who was passing by on the head and knocked him silly. I think, myself, that was the only reason he married her, for he did in the end. Not at once, of course, but after they'd carried him in unconscious, and she'd practiced the Sister of Mercy act on him. There, Carlotta, the boats are just coming. I think I'll meet them at the pier with such an enchanting smile that everybody except myself will be sorry I was stuffy this afternoon and wouldn't answer when they called!"

CHAPTER XVII

IN THE FOG

SOME days later it chanced that the five young people were spending the afternoon on the lake, Hope and Anstice in the boat, the others in the canoe. This arrangement was not wholly accidental, for Max usually held back until he saw what Hope intended to do. To-day she chose to go with Anstice, thus leaving as companions for Max the two he would have chosen. Their plan was to circle the lake and to explore all the islands.

Two of these were large, and one had a sandy beach and some big trees among the thick underbrush of its interior. Here the boys often spent the night, sleeping under a shelter of poles and bark. The spot was ideal for camping except that it lacked water. Max entertained a theory that somewhere in the vicinity a spring must exist, and on this especial afternoon he wandered away from the others to search for one. The length of the island was perhaps half a mile, and in his investigations Max strolled to the farther end. As he came out near the point, he saw that the clouds were shutting down over the mountains.

Only a few miles separated the village from the ocean, and sea fogs were not infrequent, but Max did not at the time attribute the change to this cause. He plunged inland again on his quest and came out to the lake only on reaching the extreme point of land. To his surprise, in those few moments, the mountains had completely disappeared and billows of white mist were rolling over the water. Directly ahead were June, Charlotte, and Anstice in the boat.

"Hustle, Max!" June called on seeing his cousin. "The fog is coming in like a race-horse! Hope's wandered off somewhere, and we left the canoe for you two. Charlotte's afraid Mrs. Walker will worry, so we started."

"You'd better come back and stay until it lifts," Max replied.

"It's clearer ahead," June returned, every dip of his oars increasing his distance from the island.

Max shouted another protest but the boat was swallowed by the rapidly thickening mist. He made his way back through the underbrush, feeling decidedly ruffled. He and Hope had already had one skirmish that day, and it was becoming harder for Max to ignore her constant snubs. Just now, he was annoyed with himself for having strayed off, with June for not waiting until all could start, with Hope for being left behind and with the fog that had caused the complication. He did not hurry in the least as he sauntered

back to the beach. Hope would be disagreeable anyway, and he saw no reason to hasten the unpleasant moment. Emerging from the hazel bushes, he found his cousin standing by the canoe.

"Where's the boat and the others?" she asked abruptly.

"Charlotte thought her mother might worry, so they went ahead. They left the canoe for us."

Hope gave a sniff of disgust. "They might have waited!"

Max said nothing and made no move to launch the canoe.

"Well, shall we start?" Hope inquired frostily. "There's only the one canoe, so I suppose we shall have to take it."

"You're quite welcome to go by yourself if you prefer," Max replied with equal frigidity.

"I very much prefer it!"

With her angry exclamation Hope started for the canoe, but her words brought Max to his senses. Before his cousin could reach them, he secured both paddles.

"You can't go alone," he said abruptly. "It isn't safe. June ought not to have started in this fog. You'll have to wait."

"Max Hamilton, give me one of those paddles!" commanded Hope.

Max shook his head with equal determination, and

the two angry, unreasonable young people stood on either side of the canoe, glaring at each other.

"Well!" said Hope after a pause, in biting tones of scorn. "I'm glad to find out what's the matter with you. I knew you were a prig, but now I know you're a bully who takes advantage of a girl."

For a second, Max's gray eyes fairly flashed fire. Then he flung the paddles into the canoe.

"I wish you were a boy!" he ejaculated. "There! go if you like, but if you do, I shall have to go with you!"

"I want to go alone!" said Hope angrily.

"You can't. I may be a prig and a bully, though you are the first person who ever told me so, but I am not a fool into the bargain. You know perfectly well that you don't know how to steer a canoe."

"I've paddled stern several times!" Hope retorted.

"You may have your choice," Max went on, paying no attention to this remark. "The only sensible thing is to stay where we are until the fog lifts. If you are willing to wait, I will get as far away from you as the size of the island will let me. If you insist on going, I shall have to go with you."

"If June can get back through this fog, I can."

"June happens to have a compass," interrupted her cousin. He did not add that the compass in question was his own.

"It can't be hard just to keep going straight even if we haven't a compass."

As she spoke, Hope waved her hand vaguely in the direction of the cottage and stepped into the canoe, taking the stern seat.

Max looked at her for a second in disgust, realizing his complete helplessness before her wilful insistence. Perhaps it would be better after all to let her steer, since then she could not blame him if they did not get anywhere, as most certainly they would not. He grimly took his seat in the bow and pushed the canoe off into the enveloping blanket of fog. Almost instantly the island vanished into opaque mist.

Hope paddled in silence. She could not keep time with her cousin's quick, strong strokes and she was perfectly incompetent to steer. The canoe wobbled from one side to the other, never for one moment keeping a direct course. It vacillated more than Hope realized, for nothing stationary was visible by which to gauge their progress. In addition, Max's stronger arm was constantly giving the bow a slight inclination to the right. Hope exerted all her strength, but since she did not know the proper knack of twisting the paddle as she took it from the water, the only way in which she could influence their course at all was to stop paddling entirely and use her blade as a rudder.

The fog grew denser. Hope's sailor blouse was drenched and the moisture dripped from her hair and stood in beads on her serge skirt. Max had no coat and his shirt was wet and clammy. Max's back in

front of her looked most uncompromising to Hope. He always carried himself very erect but just now his attitude was rigid.

"He looks as stiff as a poker!" thought Hope and she spoke no word of apology for the unskilful twist of her paddle that landed a quantity of cold water between her cousin's shoulder blades.

Max was holding on to his temper with all his might and this cold shower suddenly applied to his spine did not render the task less difficult. He was practically certain that they were traveling in a circle. If he only had a chance to steer, they would not waver so much and could they once strike the lake shore it would be possible to skirt it, were it never so far, until they arrived at the familiar pier. But in the manner they were progressing they might be out for hours without reaching either the shore or an island. If any land did loom up, wherever it might be, he would make one more effort to induce that pig-headed Hope to go ashore and wait until the fog should lift. Absorbed in thought, Max failed to notice a sudden, slight exclamation from Hope. He did remark that her steering grew even more erratic as the canoe slid on over oily gray waters, yet seemed all the time to remain in the same place.

June, with the help of the compass, had easily reached the pier, secretly somewhat concerned that the canoe had not followed, and that the mist, instead of

passing on, was settling down so densely. His concern was not lessened by the fact that his father took a serious view of the matter.

"You had the only compass and came off without waiting for the others? June, I thought you had more sense than that."

"It was a fool thing to do," June acknowledged as he stood on the end of the pier. "I'll go back now. I can strike the island easily enough by keeping due southwest. You come along and steer for me by the compass."

Mr. Ralston agreed, and the boat returned into the fog from which it had come. To find the island was not difficult, but as they approached, no answer came to June's hail and the canoe was not on the beach.

"They did start," said Mr. Ralston, surveying the marks left on the sand. "So my nephew hasn't any better judgment than my son."

June took the reproof in silence. "I'm surprised that Max did leave, for he wanted me to come back," he said after a pause.

"They may flounder around on the lake for hours," remarked his father. "Of course they are in no danger but they'll get wet and it will worry your mother. Since they are not here we might as well go home. Looking for them in this fog is something like hunting for a needle in a haystack."

June dipped his oars and the sandy point vanished

as if by magic. "I can't understand why they started," he again observed. "It isn't like Max, especially when he wanted me to wait. I suppose he forgot I had his compass."

"I hate to have your mother troubled. They'll be cold and hungry and the experience won't be pleasant, but aside from that, they can come to no harm. June, what's that?"

Mr. Ralston's tone had suddenly changed. June turned quickly to catch sight of a bit of yellow wood floating within reach. Mr. Ralston grasped it and held up a paddle!

"Ours is the only canoe on the lake!" he said, his face grown suddenly white.

For a moment the two stared at each other. June was first to speak.

"Father, don't look so! Perhaps they dropped it, perhaps it floated off. Just think what a crackerjack swimmer Max is! And Max would bring Hope through anything."

With an effort, Mr. Ralston pulled himself together. "Max!" he shouted through the fog, but there was no response.

"We won't take anything for granted. As you say, Max is an expert swimmer and they couldn't have capsized in this calm water. Pull slowly around here, June, and we'll keep calling."

Some hours later, after a fruitless circling of the

lake, the boat returned to the pier. Dusk was fast falling.

"We'll have to tell your mother now," said Mr. Ralston quietly. "We won't give up hope, but it looks pretty serious."

"I can never forgive myself for going off with that compass!" groaned June.

"The big mistake was their ever leaving the island," said his father consolingly. "The hardest part now, is to wait, for wait we must, until the fog lifts."

There were anxious hearts in the gray cottage that evening, but Mr. Tyler scouted the idea that any harm had come to Max and Hope and prophesied that the fog would disappear about midnight. So it proved, for just after eleven the mist grew lighter.

Provided with wraps and food, June and Mr. Ralston started in one boat, Mr. Tyler and Ben in another. Until daylight their search might be useless, but it was far easier to be doing something than to wait in inactivity for the hours to pass.

June and his father were silent as they rowed through the lifting fog. Little could be distinguished on the water, only the blacker outline of the trees along the banks. They had reached and passed the center of the lake, when Mr. Ralston suddenly stopped rowing.

"June, look quick! Isn't that a light over there? Is it in the other boat or on an island?"

"That's no lantern! It flickers too much," said June after a pause. "Father, I'm sure it's a fire and it's on the second island!"

June twitched the steering ropes as he spoke and the boat began to move for the island with all the impetus that Mr. Ralston's strong arms could give to the oars. The light increased in size as they approached and presently grew into a distinct little fire on the beach. Mr. Ralston stopped rowing.

"June," he said with a break in his voice, "just call to them. I can't."

June put his hands to his mouth and sent a long, ringing "Ahoy!" over the lake. After a few seconds, there came a reply.

"That's Max's voice!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, if Hope is only safe, too!" gasped Mr. Ralston.

"She surely is!" declared June promptly. "What do you take Max for? If they capsized and one of them went down, it wouldn't be Hope! And they haven't tipped over, for if they had, Max wouldn't have any dry matches to light his fire. Father, I see Hope now! She passed in front of the flames."

June rose to his feet in excitement.

"Oh, sit down, son!" said Mr. Ralston. "Take the oars, will you? I don't feel as though I could row any more."

"Glad to see us?" asked June as the boat approached the beach.

"I should say!" called Max.

"Nice fright you've given us!" June went on, relief at their safety turning to resentment, now the anxiety was over. His father sprang on shore and hugged both the castaways.

"Why, Uncle! Have you been so worried?" asked Max with surprise, for Mr. Ralston's manner showed under what an intense strain he had been.

"Worried?" repeated his uncle with some indignation. "We've had good reason! Your aunt is almost distracted. Mr. Tyler and Ben are out in the other boat looking for you."

"But, Uncle," said the astonished Max, "there wasn't any danger. What made you think anything had happened to us?"

Mr. Ralston seemed unable to reply and June explained the situation. "We found the paddle floating in the lake, so you can see why we are cruising around in this cheerful style. How did you lose it?"

"It was dropped overboard," Max replied. "It was out of sight in an instant and we couldn't find it."

"We must start back at once," said Mr. Ralston. "Better throw some sand on that fire, boys."

In a very few minutes the blaze was extinguished and the boat started on her homeward way, the canoe floating behind at the end of her painter.

"Max," his uncle began gravely, "I am so unspeakably thankful to find you both safe that I hesitate to say much in the way of criticism, but why did you leave the first island? The only sensible thing was to stay there. By leaving, you missed us when we came back, and because we chanced to encounter the lost paddle, we have been terribly anxious. Wouldn't it have been much wiser to wait where you were?"

"It certainly was the only thing to do."

Max's assent was so prompt and was given in so nonchalant a fashion that it struck his uncle as being impertinent.

"Your thoughtlessness in the matter has amounted to real cruelty as far as your aunt is concerned," he said rather sternly. "June made a mistake in going off without waiting for the canoe to follow. You made a worse one in leaving the island. Why did you go?" he again asked, displeased by his nephew's continued silence.

"I have no explanation to offer, Uncle George," Max replied icily. "I am quite willing to acknowledge that I made a mistake, but the mistake I made wasn't the one you think it was."

This speech puzzled Mr. Ralston, but before he could speak, Hope suddenly interfered.

"I was the one who insisted on leaving the island," she declared stiffly.

"You? Why?" asked her amazed father.

"Well, I simply didn't choose to stay there!" Hope replied with obstinate dignity. "I've had a perfectly horrid time, anyway!"

"I imagine Max hasn't had a pleasant time, either!" June retorted.

"Probably not!" Hope acknowledged coolly, though stung by a remark so plainly indicating where June's sympathies lay. "I'm to blame for leaving the island and I lost the paddle, but I dropped it only because I couldn't hold it any longer,—my wrist hurt so much!"

"Your wrist?" inquired her father. "Let me see. Why, Hope, you've wrenched it severely. It's badly swollen. How did it happen?"

"I don't know. I just twisted it somehow."

"Did you keep on paddling after you hurt it?" Mr. Ralston asked, wrapping the wrist tenderly in his moistened handkerchief.

"Yes," admitted Hope. "I wasn't going to stop! But Max didn't know I hurt myself," she added, noticing the quick glance Mr. Ralston gave his nephew.

"Indeed, I didn't!" said Max suddenly. "I wish I had known! Whew! that took pluck! However could she have paddled at all with a wrist like that?"

There was a note of admiration in his voice that did not escape Hope.

"You're a sport, Polly Anne!" June com-

mented cordially. "Not many girls but would have squealed!"

"It was plucky, little daughter," agreed Mr. Ralston, "but both unwise and unnecessary, for Max could have managed the canoe alone. But having left the island, what happened?"

"Nothing exciting, Uncle," Max replied in a manner that was a marked contrast to the way he had answered his uncle's previous questions. "The fog was frightfully thick and I am sure we traveled in circles. It was after dark before we struck any land, but then we didn't know whether it was an island or the lake shore. If it hadn't been so late, I would have kept along the edge until I found out which it was, for if it was the mainland, we could in time, reach the pier. But we couldn't see even from one end of the canoe to the other so we landed and built a fire. We were wet and cold, and I thought if any one was looking for us, it would be a beacon. It never occurred to me that you would find the lost paddle or be so anxious. We were in no danger, for the lake was perfectly smooth and any wind that could come up enough to make it rough would blow away the fog."

As Max concluded, the boat was almost at the pier, where Mrs. Ralston welcomed the castaways with eager exclamations and embraces. Just as the party reached the cottage door, Mr. Ralston felt a detaining touch on his arm.

"Uncle George," Max said frankly when they were alone, "any way this story is told isn't particularly creditable to either Hope or me. If I had kept my own temper, probably she wouldn't have wanted to leave the island. But we were both angry, and as I couldn't prevent her from going, I had to go with her. We didn't have a very pleasant time, but that was my fault as much as Hope's. I think she was frightfully plucky to paddle as she did after hurting her wrist. Of course, if I had known that she wrenched it, I'd have made her stop — if I could!" he added.

Mr. Ralston smiled. His nephew had spoken with an engaging frankness that atoned for any previous obstinacy.

"Max," he commented whimsically, "it's difficult to stay displeased with you for any length of time! I think in the course of your wanderings you must have kissed the Blarney stone, for you certainly have a persuasive way of putting things. I'll accept without further inquiry your statement that you're both in fault. But I'm not blind to the fact that you and Hope don't get along as well together as you and June. What's the reason?"

"Ask me something easier, Uncle!" Max replied with a smile. "If I were willing to tell you, I couldn't because I honestly don't know!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE KRAKEN

MAX gave considerable thought to his past interview with Mr. Lemon. More than ever he felt convinced that the story of the deed and the forest land in the Saguenay wilderness was true. The minute details of the description were convincing. It seemed quite possible that the forlorn old hermit might be the actual owner of valuable timber.

"Uncle George," he inquired one afternoon, "is there any way for a person to prove ownership in a piece of real estate, if he hasn't the documents to show?"

"Max, I'm no lawyer," declared his uncle jokingly. "Explain a bit," he added, seeing that his nephew was in earnest.

"Suppose that a man gave a deed to a second man, transferring ownership in some land. If the deed was lost, could the second man prove his right to the property?"

"If the deed had ever been recorded, his chances would be pretty good," replied Mr. Ralston. "If

there was no record, it would depend upon how clear a case he could present. Should the first party to the transaction execute a duplicate deed, there would be no question."

"But if the first party was dead or couldn't be found?"

"In that case it would seem a difficult matter; I should say an almost impossible one, especially if there was any one to oppose the proceeding. Have you discovered an air-castle to which you think you have a title?"

Max laughed. "Not exactly, Uncle. I was just wondering."

Max continued to wonder until his cogitations took a more definite form. He paid a second visit to the hermit.

"Carlotta," he said that evening, having for a moment secured Charlotte's companionship, "I've found out a little more about that Mr. Marshall. I had another talk with Mr. Lemon. Mr. Marshall used to go fishing every year in Canada. He belonged to a club and I learned the name of that. And his friends called him 'Jim.' So probably he was James Marshall."

"There is a very wealthy man of that name in Boston," volunteered Charlotte.

"Is there! I told you so!" Max exclaimed triumphantly. What Max had told her and why he

should claim the honor of pinning Mr. Marshall down to a definite habitation seemed illogical to Charlotte, but she did not interrupt.

"That settles it!" Max went on. "I'm going to find out!"

"Are you going to write to Mr. Marshall?" Charlotte inquired cautiously. She had a growing premonition that Max's cheerful facility in writing letters might somehow lead to disaster.

"He probably has hundreds of letters every day and wouldn't pay any attention to mine. There is a barrister in Boston,— a lawyer, I mean, who attends to Dad's business affairs. I'm going to ask him to find out if the James Marshall you spoke of is likely to be the one Mr. Lemon talks about."

"Do you think he will do it?" asked the still skeptical Charlotte. The way Max took it for granted that a busy legal practitioner would attend to his request rather surprised her.

"Of course he will! I shall tell him who I am. Dad pays him for doing things for him and he can do them for me, too!"

"All right!" Charlotte acquiesced. "It will be interesting, but I have a feeling that the deed will have to be found."

"I don't believe Kitty ever took it," said Max meditatively. "I think, as you said, it is round the house somewhere. I'd like to go in and look, but probably

he wouldn't let me. I suppose I can't exactly turn things upside down without his permission.

"I found out another interesting thing, too," Max went on, not noticing how amused Charlotte looked at the idea of forcibly entering Mr. Lemon's house, even on a benevolent errand. "The old chap was really quite lucid to-day. He told me that there is a cave up on Baldface, not very far up, either, and I'm going to hunt for it."

"Probably there is," said Charlotte. "But there are so many ledges that it may be hard to find. Perhaps he would show you."

"He's too feeble for any climbing. Do you know, I think it jogs his brain to talk in French. If he had to do it in English, he might not say so much nor so connectedly. He isn't sane, of course, but I think he's more so when he's speaking his native language. He doesn't seem so old."

"I think it's good of you to go and talk with him," began Charlotte but just then June hailed them.

"What do you mean by going off like this when it's Mother's last evening here?" he demanded. "Just come along quick, both of you!"

Max felt decidedly depressed the next day when Mr. and Mrs. Ralston had actually started for their trip north. He had grown extremely fond of Uncle George and probably would not see him again. He

looked very sober as the carriage turned the curve and the last fluttering handkerchief was lost to view.

The mid-afternoon sun shone warm on the pines and the swaying elms cast flickering trails of light and shade on the grassy slope before the cottage. June looked irresolutely around him.

"What shall we do? We might fish. We can take the boat and then Molly can go."

"Molly hates so to keep still," said Hope. "You go, if you like, but I'd rather she would stay here. Supper will be ready at six, so don't be late. Mother said we could go to the Tylers' if we liked, but I want to try housekeeping for a little."

June and Max sauntered to the lake and launched the canoe. Neither the hour nor the weather was favorable for fishing so they paddled idly along the shore. Max was unusually silent as he steered and kept the canoe close in under the shadow of Baldface. June made one or two tentative strokes in a different direction, but it was difficult to change their course when the steersman had other ideas. In fun, June made a determined effort to turn the canoe. Max saw, and with his own paddle counteracted the attempt. The next moment a laughing struggle began. June was a little the stronger of the two, but Max had the advantage of six inches' length in his paddle. The canoe began to rock dangerously.

"No, you don't!" exclaimed Max as June's last stroke turned the bow. "Oh, I say!"

As he spoke, the canoe capsized and both boys went completely under. For a moment, old Baldface looked down upon a swamped green canoe, the floating paddles, and ripples slowly widening over the lake. Then two sleek heads reappeared at some distance from the floating craft.

"You ought to be ashamed!" began June, throwing water in his cousin's face as they seized the gunwale on either side.

"Let's postpone this war till we get ashore. Do catch that paddle — the other has gone some distance."

A truce was declared; June rescued the floating bit of wood; and they swam and pushed the canoe before them into water sufficiently shallow to permit of its being emptied.

"Really, you know," said Max as they climbed in and he turned the bow in the direction of the escaped paddle; "I went in so suddenly that I ran into a fish! His tail went right into my mouth!"

"Pity you didn't shut it!" grinned his cousin. "If you'd arisen from the lake with a fish in your teeth it would be a tale worth telling. As it is, you have a string of eel-grass in your hair. Shall we try it again?"

"Let's wait till we have on our bathing suits. Of course we're soaked now, but we'll probably capsize

again and I'm afraid of injuring my watch. One ducking doesn't seem to have hurt it, but two might do the business."

June looked at his own timepiece which was still ticking cheerily.

"That's so! We'll try it out some morning. How beastly wet shoes do feel!"

Hope did not see the boys when they returned, for she had begun her preparations for supper. Max was dressed first, and having dropped his soaked garments from the window, went out through the kitchen, intending to hang them on the line behind the house.

The room was full of smoke pouring from every crack and crevice of the stove, while Hope was looking in horror at the yellow-white wreaths that curled upward in appalling volume.

"There's something wrong with the drafts," commented Max.

Hope turned a withering glance in his direction. "You know so much about everything — why don't you fix them, then?"

Max started abruptly for the outer door, an angry flash lighting his eyes, but the next instant he came back to the smoking stove. Slamming in one draft with unnecessary violence, he jerked open another; the fumes instantly ceased and with a crackle, the fire burned merrily.

Hope was shielding her smarting eyes and when she

again looked about her, the smoke was fast drifting through the door that Max had left open behind him, and a cheerful roar was coming from the balky stove.

"Max makes me so tired!" she thought ungraciously. "Molly darling, don't you want to help sister?"

Molly was in search of clothespins for her cousin and in her endeavor to reach the basket for herself, upset them over the floor.

"Tell Max he can just pick them up!" exclaimed Hope as Molly seized a handful and with an impish laugh ran into the open air.

Hope's irritation increased as the minutes passed, and the clothespins were scattered far and wide as she crossed the kitchen floor in her various journeyings from pantry to closet. At last, attracted by peals of laughter from her little sister, she looked out. Max had rolled Molly tightly in the hammock and was swinging her.

"Max, I want Molly to come directly in. And I shall not touch a single one of these clothespins! She spilled them because you sent her for them."

"We don't mind picking up clothespins, do we, Molly, as long as it isn't a spilled temper?" muttered Max. "Come on, let's play they are kitties, little furry kitties. See whether you can catch more than I do!"

Molly entered into the game with a shriek of de-

light, the rough kitchen floor transformed for her into a charming fairyland peopled with pussies of various colors, all soft and friendly. Never had wilful Molly so promptly collected her scattered toys.

Hope was not satisfied to have the simple supper that Mrs. Ralston had served all summer, and the table was spread according to her own ideas. The salad looked tempting, and was prettily decorated with ferns. On either side were a plate of hot biscuits and a dish of lemon jelly with whipped cream.

"This sure is a feast!" commented June as he whisked Molly into her high chair.

Hope herself was feeling in a better humor, for the biscuits had risen beautifully. While June served the salad, she was occupied in preparing Molly's bread and milk, and was really startled when her brother, with a spluttered choke, suddenly rose and rushed from the room.

Max had been unusually sober and he had not tasted the salad. He took a mouthful and abruptly followed June. Molly, thinking this was some new game, arose in her chair and wished to join in the fascinating pursuit. Outside, Hope could hear the boys laughing and vigorously pumping water. She tasted the salad that looked so delicious, and dropped her fork in horror. Why — oh, why, when she filled the lamps, had she neglected to wipe up the oil that ran over the dresser? She had completely forgotten

it, and had been unlucky enough to lay the lettuce in that very spot!

When the boys returned, unnaturally grave, no trace of the unpalatable salad was to be seen, and only clean, empty plates awaited them. Hope, with a red spot on either cheek, was patiently attending to Molly's supper.

The best way out of the situation was a laugh, but Max did not feel merry, and June, knowing his sister's uncertain temper, did not dare to joke. They sat down and sampled the biscuits which were an undoubted credit to the cook. Biscuits and blueberries were not substantial food for two hungry boys and presently June ventured a remark.

"Have you any objection to my opening a tin and slicing a couple of sardines?"

Hope with an effort kept her temper under control.

"Open what you like, but it's mean to make fun of me!"

"We haven't!" protested her brother as he went to investigate the supply of canned goods. At this point, Molly refused to take another mouthful from her sister's hand and demanded that Max should feed her. In Hope's over-sensitive condition, this seemed an added insult, and feeling that she could no longer suppress the threatening explosion, she left the table.

"Come here then, you little wretch!" growled Max,

jerking Molly's high chair nearer him and stuffing a tremendous spoonful of bread and milk into the red mouth she held so invitingly open. Molly merely wriggled with joy, for though her cousin's words were abrupt, his touch and tone were gentle.

"Why can't you feed yourself, and not put your foot in it every time you open your mouth?"

Molly regarded him with thoughtful eyes and then looked inquiringly at her sandal.

"Too dusty," she explained, and Max was obliged to laugh.

"All the same, Molly, you get your own way more than any kiddie I ever knew!"

June returned with a tin of tongue and some cottage cheese he had found in the refrigerator.

"I saw Mother making this, so I guess it isn't flavored with kerosene!" he commented in a cautious whisper.

Hope, in her room, recovered from the mortification caused by the salad, but she still nursed the injury inflicted by wilful Molly. In her absence the boys talked more freely, and presently there came an explosion of laughter. After puzzling over its cause for some moments, she went out.

The laughter ceased with her appearance. The boys were eating lemon jelly and she saw nothing to explain their mirth. Molly, like the coquette she was,

instantly abandoned Max and returned to her sister. Somewhat comforted, Hope patted the dear curly head, and sat down beside her.

"Don't you want some of the nice jelly with the cream, darling? You know you like cream."

Molly didn't like that cream and said so emphatically. Hope caught a suppressed chuckle from her brother and her suspicions were aroused.

"Hope, do laugh!" remonstrated June a second later. "What's the use of being grouchy? Why don't you see the fun of it?"

"It doesn't strike me as being funny!" Hope answered, "but what is it, anyway?"

"We haven't finished guessing. It is neither salt nor saleratus. It may be flour."

"It was in a jar and Mother said it was pulverized sugar! I used it to sweeten the cream."

"If she said that, she spoke rashly!" commented June cheerfully. "What *is* it, Hope?"

"I don't know. It doesn't taste like anything I ever ate before."

"Well, show us the jar you got it from. If it's poison, I want to know the cause of my death."

The jar was unlabeled and contained a fine white powder.

"Corn starch?" suggested Max.

"Guess again! I know corn starch when I taste it."

"It's cream of tartar!" declared Hope, smiling at last.

"I breathe once more!" sighed her brother. "I was about to pronounce it plaster of Paris. Cheer up, Polly Anne; your biscuits were perfect skyrockets! Cream of tartar won't hurt any one and I'm going to start in again. Molly will eat it if you put some sugar on it."

"I don't want her to; it may not agree with her."

June looked relieved at the tone in which Hope spoke and the supper ended in peace.

"It is a dandy evening!" he exclaimed when they had dutifully helped with the dishes. "Let's get the girls and all go on the lake. Can't Molly come along?"

"She must go to bed," replied Hope, hanging up the last dish towel. "I wouldn't dare go off and leave her in the house. I really don't mind staying with her."

"Why can't she come, too?"

"Oh, she mustn't! Mother is so particular about her being in bed early."

June was sorry, for he wished Hope to be of the party, but it was true that Molly's bed hour ought not to be changed, so he and Max started up the road to the Tylers'. After a moment, June slid an arm around his cousin's neck.

"Don't you feel well, old chap? You seem blue. You don't really mind Hope, do you?"

"Oh — not much! I was so sorry to have Uncle George go. I shall not see him again, and I was just wondering whether I'm going to spend all my life meeting people whom I like tremendously and then having to say good-by to them."

Max's tone was sober and he looked depressed.

"You'd better stay with us and go to school with me this winter. I wish you would! Father and Mother would be so delighted to have you — won't Uncle Rod let you if you ask him?"

"Perhaps he would, but — I couldn't, June! He hasn't any one but me, you know. When I go to college we shall be separated, and till then I want to stay with him."

"If it wasn't that we shall go to Yale together, I would move heaven and earth to have you stay," declared June emphatically. "But Uncle Rod won't be in Rome until Christmas; you might stay through the fall."

Max shook his head. "I'd have a sweet time trying to catch up in school. I was out all last year, you know. St. George thought me lazy before that, and I'm afraid I'm worse than ever after all this vacation. I see a strenuous winter ahead of me, for I know I shall hate to study. Still, I must go back."

"What will you do alone till Uncle Rod comes?"

"We never give up our apartment; it will be ready for me if I like, but I dare say I shall stay with the

Thornleys or with the Lisles if they are back so early. There are stacks of friendly people and I shall have more invitations than I can possibly accept. Then I shall be fearfully busy, so Dad and Christmas will arrive almost before I know it."

Max spoke more cheerfully and as he finished, they reached the big, old-fashioned farmhouse where the Walkers were boarding. Charlotte sat on the front porch reading to her mother, while Anstice was playing in the yard with Mr. Tyler's collie.

Prince rushed joyfully to meet the boys and jumped around them, recognizing good comrades, while Anstice hailed their arrival with pleasure.

Charlotte hesitated a little when the plan of rowing on the lake was proposed, but Mrs. Walker told her to go.

"It will soon be too cool to stay out and I have a letter to write. We will finish the story to-morrow. Be sure to take your sweaters and don't stay later than nine."

When they reached the lake the canoe seemed more attractive than the boat, for paddling was much more fun than rowing, and none of them was heavy and the water was not very rough.

The girls sat in the bottom and June took the stern paddle. The sunset sky behind Baldface was radiant and a little wisp of a moon was tilted above the mountain.

"There's the new moon!" exclaimed Anstice. "Which shoulder should you see it over?"

"The right," Max replied, "but what luck shall I have? I saw it first with my front face!"

"That should be best of all!" decided Charlotte. "Oh, look at Baldface! Isn't it lovely to have a lace-edged mountain?"

The row of trees along the crown was silhouetted against the sunset like fine lace stretching the entire length of the long ridge. Nan regarded it meditatively.

"Baldface looks alive to-night. I shouldn't wonder if he was getting ready to turn over."

"Let's hope he waits till we are off the lake," laughed June. "I wouldn't give much for our chances if Baldface flops into it while we're here!"

As the sunset glow faded, the moon grew brighter. They skirted the base of the mountain, paddling softly and hearing interesting noises from the woods. Far in the distance a lost lamb kept crying mournfully and the reiterated sound seemed to disturb Charlotte.

"Poor little thing! I suppose he's lonesome and wants his mother."

"It's good for him; it exercises his lungs," replied the unsympathetic June.

They passed Mystery Point and entered the deeper shadow of another hill. Suddenly Max stopped paddling and looked intently before him.

"What is it?" inquired his cousin. "Breakers ahead?"

"I don't know. There's a queer thing just off the bow."

Charlotte and Anstice craned their necks and the next moment both they and June caught sight of a singular object. It was quite large and was moving with apparent rapidity. Still, the water itself was so rough that it was difficult to judge how much of its motion might be due to the waves.

The object was white with dark spots at intervals, and as the canoe approached, presented a rather threatening appearance. The little moon did not throw sufficient light through the thickening dusk to give it any definite form.

"Nan, I reckon that's your kraken!" said June laughingly.

The next instant June wished he had not spoken, for Anstice gave a scream.

"Oh, it's coming for us! It's coming straight at us!"

"Nan, *sit down!*" shouted June. "You'll have us all in the lake!"

"Nan, keep still!" warned Charlotte. "But — oh, don't go any nearer! It does look so dreadful!"

The boys obediently turned the canoe away, and almost instantly lost sight of the singular object.

"It's queer what that could be," said Max. "It

looked as much like a drowned red and white spotted calf as anything."

"It was alive! I know it was!" declared Anstice, who was still much frightened.

"Would you girls be afraid to be landed on the point while we go back and see what it is?" asked June. "I hate not to find out."

The point was bright with sand and moonlight, and the girls consented to be left there.

"I'm ashamed to be scared," admitted Charlotte as she stepped ashore, "but it did look so dreadful!"

Charlotte and Anstice sat down on the beach and the canoe shot off into the dusk. They could see its outlines quite distinctly and note its progress, at first rapid, and then slowing cautiously as it approached the scene of their late fright. For an instant it paused, rocked by the waves, and then to the ears of the listening girls came a peal of laughter. Away on the other side of the lake, Blueberry flung back the mirth from its echoing rocks. The boys were still laughing when the bow of the canoe again grated on the sand.

"What was it?" demanded Anstice eagerly.

"We want you to see. You needn't be afraid. It won't hurt you."

In spite of this assurance, the object looked very formidable as they drew near for the second time and the closer they came, the harder it was not to believe

it a living thing. Anstice was clutching Charlotte tightly, for it seemed as if the creature, whatever it might be, was swimming rapidly toward them with the purpose of getting aboard.

"Oh, I don't want to see it!" she exclaimed. "Do tell us what it is and don't go any nearer!"

The canoe was now only a length away, and Max, reaching forward, struck the object with his paddle. A dull reverberation followed.

"Ah, I see!" gasped Charlotte. "But how can it look so queer?"

"It's an odd shape anyway, and being a birch log, the bark has peeled off and left that red and white spotted effect," explained Max. "That gnarled place looks like a head and the motion of the water makes it appear to be swimming."

"I'm so glad you went back to see what it was! We should have thought of it all night if you hadn't."

"You'd better believe Max and I were going to see what was the nature of the beast before we sought our downy pillows!" laughed June as the canoe started again on its interrupted circuit of the lake.

"It's been lovely on the water this evening," said Charlotte when they were nearly at the pier. "I shall think of it next winter and of the kraken and all."

"Tell Hope I want her to teach me that crochet stitch right after dinner to-morrow. Don't forget, please, for it is very important."

"Nan," laughed Charlotte, "you and Hope will see each other several times before dinner."

"I know it, but still they may as well remember to tell her," replied Anstice stoutly.

CHAPTER XIX

"WHERE IS MOLLY?"

AS Charlotte prophesied, Anstice saw Hope several times before midday, and had ample opportunity to announce her intention of learning the new crochet stitch.

Things had gone better with Hope that morning. Breakfast was prepared without accident except that the chocolate was scorched, but as neither boy appeared to find it undrinkable, the meal passed pleasantly. Later, Molly, in her endeavor to help, tipped a pail of cold water over herself and the floor, but since it was Molly who did it, Hope patiently swept and mopped the flood.

Anstice came directly after dinner and the two established themselves on the shady porch where they were soon deep in the mysteries of chain one, skip two, and other intricacies of a crochet pattern.

An hour later Hope suddenly realized that Molly had not been in evidence for some time. Usually the little sister was hanging around the older girls, teasing to share in their employment and being put off with loving words and kisses.

"Where is Molly?" she exclaimed.

"Isn't she with the boys?" asked Anstice. "She went down the steps a long time ago and said she was going to Max."

"Then she'll be in a dreadful state, for he always lets her do whatever she likes, and I dressed her up this afternoon. I was so tired of her rompers that I put on that little white dress which makes her look like a baby angel."

Hope dropped her work and went around the house. Her cousin was reading in the hammock under the birches, but there was no sign of the little sister.

"Max, where's Molly?"

"I haven't seen her."

"She said she was coming to you, and I supposed you'd look out for her," commented Hope impatiently.

Max flushed indignantly as he rose from the hammock.

"Molly didn't come to me; I should have taken care of her if she had."

"If she's lost, it's your fault!" retorted Hope, annoyed by the stiff dignity of her cousin's tone.

Max threw his book into the hammock and without reply, started toward the lake. Molly was doubtless with June or playing by herself on the fascinating and forbidden pier. The water for a long distance was

very shallow and if she tumbled in, nothing worse than a wetting could befall her.

It was a warm day for Maine, and partly on that account, partly because like Hope, he was tired of camp garments, Max had put on a white flannel suit. It was extremely becoming, and his annoyance with his cousin had sent a flush of color into his tanned cheeks. He sauntered down to the boat house where June was sandpapering one of the paddles.

"What do you take us for?" inquired June, scrutinizing him from head to foot. "Are you going to be married or are you trying to astonish the natives? Those togs are very swell, but we're not used to such grandeur. If it is your wedding day, you might have told me in time to sport my own glad rags."

Max smiled and knocked a chip into the water with the toe of his white canvas shoe. He did not take his hands from his pockets.

"Has Molly been down here?" he inquired after a lazy survey of the placid lake.

"Not she. Has she bolted?"

"It seems so. Hope doesn't know where she is."

"She's probably gone to the Tylers' to find Charlotte."

"I'll go down and see," said Max, turning back, quite willing on his own account to seek Charlotte's company.

June scraped away at the paddle for some moments longer, until Hope came flying down the path.

"June, we can't find Molly anywhere! She isn't at the Tylers', and Charlotte hasn't seen her, and Nan and I have looked all around the cottage and the grove."

"She hasn't been here. Little wretch, she ought to be walloped!" grumbled June. "Did you look in the barn?"

"Everywhere! And one of the kittens is missing; she must have taken it with her."

June laid aside the paddle and rose to his feet.

"We'll soon get her. She ought to be spanked and if I find her, I'm going to do it."

Hope paid no attention to this remark, knowing that her brother would never carry out his threat. She had heard him plead more than once in naughty Molly's behalf.

June was not especially concerned as he left his task, but after half an hour's search vigorously conducted by all five young people, matters began to look serious. The immediate neighborhood had been thoroughly gone over, and no trace of the child was found.

Max and Charlotte started for the village, Charlotte taking the short cut, and Max the longer way by the road, while June and Hope went in the opposite direction, each following a roadway to an isolated farm, and Anstice searched the half-obliterated cart-

path leading through the woods to a point on the lake.

An hour later, both Hope and Anstice were crying, and June was looking pale and concerned. Had a balloon suddenly carried Molly away, she could have disappeared no more completely. Anstice went to ask her mother's advice, and presently they heard the sound of the big horn that summoned Mr. Tyler and the hired man to dinner. Its blast at that unusual time would show them at once that something serious had happened and they would stop work immediately.

Charlotte and Max returned, having canvassed the village. Molly had not visited any of the houses where it was just possible she might have taken it into her curly head to go, nor had any one seen her. It was quite plain that she had not wandered in that direction, for she could scarcely escape notice by some one.

June ran down again to the lake. How could Molly have come there when he had himself been on the pier all the afternoon? The sunny, placid water, reflecting the fleecy clouds, could have no dreadful secret to give up.

By this time, Hope was terribly frightened, and was clinging to her brother and sobbing when Mr. Tyler and Ben arrived.

"Now, Hope, we'll find her," said the kindly farmer when he had heard the tale. "It stands to reason she

can't be far. June, you go through the grove again; and Max, take the path round the swamp, and Ben and I'll tackle the pasture and the woodlot. You girls go where you please, only cover as much ground as you can. Keep calling all the time. She may be asleep under some bush and be passed right by."

Charlotte and Anstice lingered a moment to pet Hope, who was crying on Mrs. Tyler's shoulder.

"We'll find her," soothed the tender-hearted woman. "Father says if they don't get her this time, he'll ring the meeting-house bell to call out the village. Cheer up, Hope! There isn't a man who won't turn out to hunt for Molly."

The three girls spent another hour in anxious search, and then wandered sadly back to the cottage. Mrs. Walker had come to see if she could be of any comfort or assistance, and Hope knelt on the floor with her head in Mrs. Walker's lap, while Charlotte and Anstice, with tear-stained faces, were huddled close in silent sympathy. The sun was gone now and the twilight was deepening.

"My Molly, my own Molly!" sobbed poor Hope. "Mamma trusted me with her and I forgot her the very first day!"

"Oh, Hope darling," said Mrs. Walker, "don't blame yourself! I don't think it was your fault; no one —"

She stopped suddenly, for through the gathering

darkness came the deep sound of the church bell, not ringing for service now, but calling all within hearing to come and search for Molly.

The sound terrified the girls, but Mrs. Tyler, seated by the window, spoke cheerily.

"There, Father's roused the village! Now, she'll soon be found! Just as quick as the men can get their lanterns, there'll be fifty or seventy-five out. I'll build a fire, and heat some water so we can give her a hot bath as soon as they bring her in."

"It's growing cold, and she had only that thin little white dress — it wasn't half so warm as her rompers," choked Hope. "Oh, what will Mother say! Oughtn't we to telegraph?"

"No, dear, certainly not yet," said Mrs. Walker decidedly. "It would only make a bad matter worse."

The long minutes passed and the anxious group of watchers in the cottage saw lights flickering through the trees and down the road. The search party was being organized. Lanterns flashed here and there, and orders were shouted from one to another.

"Where's Max?" exclaimed Anstice. "He went to search the swamp road and, Mamma, he didn't come back!"

"That's so!" said Mrs. Tyler suddenly. "He didn't turn up when Father and Ben and June came back! And Father told him just to follow the cartpath through to Bolton's pasture. I'll speak to Father

about it. The Lord help us if either Max or Molly has got into the brier swamp!" she added in a low tone to herself as she went hastily out to meet the approaching men.

Mr. Tyler seemed to think Max's non-appearance of some importance, and after a moment's conference among themselves, half the party spread out to search the woods, and the others, with Mr. Tyler and June, turned toward the swamp.

"Why do they take guns?" asked Anstice, terrified by the sight of firearms.

"So as to let one another know when she's found," reassured Mrs. Tyler. "The man who finds her will fire a shot as a signal to the rest. Land, no! There's no animal that could hurt her!"

CHAPTER XX

THE BRIER SWAMP

MAX had followed the swamp road, looking anxiously on either side for traces of the runaway, and constantly calling his little cousin's name. He had forgotten Hope's unkindness — nothing mattered before the dreadful fact that Molly could not be found.

The sun was fast approaching the top of Baldface and the shadows were lengthening. Max could not endure the thought of baby Molly, out alone — no one knew where,— and night coming so fast.

The path he was following led around a swamp to pastures beyond. Mr. Tyler had early warned all the young people never to try to penetrate the tangle that stretched eastward from the trail, saying briefly that it was a dangerous spot, though he had not stated definitely just why it was to be avoided.

Max saw no sign of the little girl, but suddenly a small animal bounded from the sweet fern edging the path, and with a mew of recognition, rubbed against his ankle. It was Linnikin!

"Oh, kitten, kitten!" said Max, picking it up.

"How I wish God would make a miracle happen and let you tell me where Molly is! Molly! Molly!" he called.

There was no answer, but the kitten had been missing with the baby, and petted Linnikin would never voluntarily be found down the swamp road. It was the first clue to Molly's whereabouts, and Max left the path on the side from which the kitten had come, and approached the edge of the swamp. It was thickly grown, and though he did not know it, was a dense tangle of cruel "devil-brier."

Max patroled its edge, still holding the contented kitten, and calling his little cousin. Was he mistaken? Was there not a reply?"

"Molly! Molly Cottontail!" he shouted, using her father's pet name for his baby. A cry certainly greeted him.

"It's Max, Molly. Where are you, darling?"

"Here!" came Molly's faint little voice. "I can't det out!" she sobbed.

This time the reply was distinct. Max dropped the kitten and plunged into the swamp. He forced his way through its thick growth toward the sound of Molly's voice, but thirty feet in, was brought to a stand by a thicket of devil-brier. It seemed impenetrable and his hands were badly scratched as he attempted to pass its barrier.

"I must get exactly opposite Molly and then go

in," he thought. This was not easy to accomplish, for the child was too little to understand the importance of her replies as a means of guidance. Worn out with her struggles and comforted by the sound of her cousin's voice, she was inclined to relapse into silence. Max coaxed and persuaded her to answer until he reached the spot where her voice seemed nearest.

"Molly, how did you ever get in there?" he exclaimed as he faced the cruel thorny creepers that barred the way.

"I went to det kitty," replied tearful Molly.

"She must have crawled!" thought Max. Such progress was out of the question for him, and setting his teeth, he broke through the matted vines. It was a desperately hard task; they scratched his face and hands, clung to his clothes, twisted around arms and legs and made every foot of ground a genuine battlefield.

Max gave no thought to himself; he struggled on, and at last came within sight of Molly's dress through the gathering darkness of the swamp. It was far from being a white dress now; indeed, there was not much left of it, but it was a glimmer of light to guide him.

"Molly darling, can't you come to cousin Max?" he gasped when he was within three yards of the child and his last exertions had left him breathless.

"Tan't," choked Molly, "bad bush won't let go!"

Max grimly fought his way on, and finally came within reach of the baby. Poor Molly! She was fast by the curls to a tangle of brier. With a sob of relief she stretched appealing little hands to her cousin.

"Poor, darling Molly!" said Max, kneeling in the swamp beside her and trying to untangle the curls, while Molly put cold chubby arms around his neck. Her dress had been torn almost from her; she had lost both sandals, and the brier had scratched her cheeks and shoulder. Still, it was a mystery how she could have penetrated so far into the tangle and received so little injury. The cruel thorns were less numerous near the ground, and her crawling with the kitten seemed to have saved her from serious harm.

Max could not disengage the curls and he did not dare delay. Had he known the dreadful creeper that gave the swamp so evil a name, he would have gone for help before ever entering it. There was little daylight left and he needed it for the journey back. He took his knife from his pocket, opened the tiny scissors it contained, and cut the entangled hair.

"I don't know what Aunt Helen will think, but it's the only way," he said half-aloud.

Molly clung to him in absolute relief and comfort, and Max kissed the little bare, scratched shoulder. Then he took off his torn flannel coat, wrapped Molly

carefully in it, head and all, took her in his arms and started to force his way from the swamp, retracing as far as possible his steps.

The creepers seemed to have closed upon his path. Max was already tired, and he was facing a task that would have tried the strength of a grown man. Molly was surprisingly meek, however, consented to have her head wrapped, and only cried out once when a thorn caught her foot.

"Oh, Molly, we must be brave!" said poor Max. "Indeed, I'm trying not to let the thorns hurt you. Curl your feet up and stay just as close to me as you can."

The desperation in his voice penetrated even Molly's child consciousness.

"Molly will be brave," she sobbed, "but she wants her mamma!"

Coming into the swamp seemed play to the getting out. More than once Max feared that he as well as Molly was doomed to a night among the briers.

"Anyway," he thought, "if we do have to stop till they find us, she will neither freeze nor be scared to death."

The mosquitoes were almost as bad as the brier and Max could ill defend himself from either. Foot by foot he struggled on, not daring to pause, lest he should lose the only compass he had,— the glow in

the western sky. When that was gone, he would not dare move for fear of going in the wrong direction and involving himself still deeper in the tangle.

It seemed hours before he reached at last the fringe of shrubs and underbrush that was free from the devil-brier, and a few rods more brought him to the open swamp road. The frogs were peeping merrily as they did every evening, and a whippoorwill was calling in the distance, while here and there bats were flitting.

Too exhausted for further effort, Max sat down on a stone, clasping his burden tightly. He felt a soft touch and looked around to see the purring kitten which had patiently waited his reappearance. Molly, safely wrapped in his coat, was asleep against his shoulder.

Not more than five minutes elapsed after he emerged from the swamp before lights appeared down the road. Max heard the voices and tried to call, but something seemed to be the matter with his throat; he could scarcely whisper. With difficulty he rose to his feet and pluckily started toward the search party.

June and Mr. Tyler were in the lead and they saw him before Max, blinded by the lanterns, recognized them. June was fairly choking as he took the precious little sister, whom Max gave over gladly, dropping his weary arms in relief.

FOOT BY FOOT HE STRUGGLED ON, NOT DARING TO PAUSE.—*Page 287.*

"How did she ever get into the swamp?" demanded Mr. Tyler. "Good land! Max, you've been through the devil-brier!"

His exclamation was drowned in a murmur of surprise and sympathy from the men who crowded up. Max, in his white trousers, shirt and thin under-flannels, had been quite unprotected from the dreaded creeper. His garments had been badly torn and in places were wet and red. His hair, too, was matted with perspiration and his face streaked with scratches.

"I must look a sight!" he began in his usual cheerful manner, but Mr. Tyler suddenly put his own coat around his shoulders.

"Here, Jem, and you, Charlie — you're husky fellows! This boy doesn't take another step to-night! Sam, fire your gun."

The anxious group in the cottage heard the shot and started up. There came another — and yet another!

"Praise the Lord!" exclaimed Mrs. Tyler. "She's found, and she's alive and she's not hurt! That's what the three shots are for! Hope, don't you want to fix her supper yourself? I'll get the bath ready to pop her right into."

It was not long before the lanterns appeared down the road, casting flickering lights on the surrounding fields and trees. There were so many that the advancing procession could be distinctly seen; June car-

rying Molly and the kitten she had demanded and was tightly clutching, and near them a dingy white figure sitting erect on the men's shoulders.

Hope darted out as they approached the cottage and snatched Molly from her brother's arms. Such a dirty, torn, scratched, mosquito-bitten Molly, with three curls jaggedly cut off — but Molly alive and unharmed! Hope hugged her, quite unable to speak or to notice any one else. But the next moment she realized that the crowd of men was cheering, and cheering for Max.

"Max found her and he went through the devil-brier to get her," said Mrs. Tyler, openly wiping her eyes. "Poor boy, Father says he's in an awful state! You take Molly into your room and strip her clothes right off, and then you and the girls can bathe her. I want to see to Max myself."

Not until Molly, washed, combed and fed, with her bites and scratches lovingly cared for by the three girls, had been tucked into her crib to sleep in peace, did Hope notice what else was going on. The throbbing of a motor-car before the cottage attracted her attention first.

"June," she demanded, waylaying her brother for a moment as she encountered him in the hall, "did they send for a doctor? Is Max really hurt?"

"He's dreadfully scratched," June replied, his usually merry face wearing a serious expression. "He

didn't want them to telephone for the doctor but they insisted."

As June spoke, the door into the boys' room sprung its latch and opened a crack. "Now, see here!" they heard Max say; "I jolly well *won't* be bandaged like a mummy! Doctor dear, you'd not like it yourself, I know!"

At this characteristic protest June gave a convulsive snort, but Dr. Leonard apparently remained unmoved.

"My son," he replied firmly, though in a tone of amusement, "you're going to have your shoulder and arm and both ankles *all* bandaged so you may just as well make up your mind to it in the beginning. And when we've finished that little job, I'm going to put some plaster on your face!"

"I guess Max has met his match for once!" June grinned as the door closed. "But, Hope," he added, turning to his sister with a complete change of manner, "there's one thing I hope you'll appreciate. Max did this for Molly!"

"You'd have done it, too!" Hope retorted.

"Of course I would if I'd been the one who found her. But Max *did* it and he's not so strong as I am, and Mr. Tyler says that brier is a tough proposition for a vigorous man. Hope, you've treated Max meaner than dirt and the reason why gets me! Ever since he came, you've been a perfect pill! I haven't known what to make of you! I've just one thing to

say now! If after this, you don't right about face, I shall honestly think you're possessed!"

Hope stood in silence, leaning against the unpainted door, her face white under its tawny aureole. June seldom laid down the law to her, and when he did assert himself it meant something.

To-night his words tore asunder the veil of self-pity and foolish prejudice with which Hope had blinded her conscience all summer long. In a sudden flash of insight she saw herself as she appeared to her brother and doubtless to her cousin.

"Oh, June!" she choked, almost stunned by the realization, "you never said a truer thing! I think I *have* been possessed!"

CHAPTER XXI

HOPE CHANGES HER MIND

MRS. TYLER always rose with the birds to set her household affairs in train for the day, but on the morning after Molly's escapade, she was afoot at an unusually early hour.

Her arrangements completed, leaving the kitchen in charge of her capable assistant, Sally, she started up the road to the Ralston cottage. It was nearly seven and the sun was high. The men, having finished the "chores" around house and barn, had been in the fields an hour.

There seemed no sign of life about the gray house under the elms, but a tall boyish figure in a blue bathing suit was disappearing down the path to the lake.

"There goes June," thought Mrs. Tyler. "Likely Hope will be awake by this time."

The kitchen door was unfastened and as she stepped in, a fretful wail from Molly greeted her ears, with Hope's voice trying to soothe the little sister.

Hope herself looked out as Mrs. Tyler's heavy tread crossed the living-room.

"Well, how's Molly?" Mrs. Tyler asked cheerily.

"And how's Hope?" she added as she noticed the girl's heavy eyes. Hope looked as if she had slept poorly and cried half the night.

"I feel rather tired. Molly seems to be all right, but oh, she is awfully cross!"

"She will be fretty to-day; that's to be expected with her bites and scratches," said Mrs. Tyler, looking kindly at sulky Molly, who scowled from her bed and refused to be washed and dressed.

"Now, Hope, when you and June are ready, you go right along down to the house and get your breakfast. Sally's expecting you. Molly will be all you can manage to-day and you'd better not try any housekeeping. Molly, don't you want to be dressed and go down and have breakfast with Charlotte and Nan?"

Molly decided that she did, and at this prospect her temper slightly improved.

"It is ever so kind of you, Mrs. Tyler," said Hope, who was combing her own hair. She looked pale and its heavy hanging masses accentuated her lack of color.

"I see June's gone to the lake so I'll step into their room and see for myself how Max is," said Mrs. Tyler, rising to her feet. "When you are ready, Hope, just take Molly and go along. I am going to cook Max some breakfast here."

"When you've been in, will you tell me how he feels?" asked Hope a little hesitatingly. She waited

rather eagerly for Mrs. Tyler's reappearance, listening to the heavy footfalls that made the floor in the boys' room creak.

"Max is pretty stiff and sore," reported Mrs. Tyler. "I guess he feels worse than he wants to admit, but he's a plucky lad. Dr. Leonard made him promise to stay in bed till after he came to-day. That was clever of the doctor, for he doesn't mean to come till late afternoon, but he knew he couldn't keep Max where he is in any other way."

"Is he going to be really ill?"

Something in Hope's voice troubled kind Mrs. Tyler.

"Land, no, child! He's just scratched and sore. He'll be all right by the end of the week, but you see he was pretty well played-out struggling through that brier and the doctor wanted him to have a good rest. Let me fix her hair, Hope; I can't do much for Max until June is dressed and out.

"I remember, years ago," went on Mrs. Tyler, touching Molly's curls with cautious hands, "Mr. Tyler's brother Jim was visiting us. He was just a young fellow, and one Sunday morning he started off across lots to the Barrett place. Jim thought considerable of Lydia Barrett so I wasn't surprised when he didn't turn up for dinner. I didn't keep mine waiting for him any, and after the dishes were done, Father harnessed up and we went over the hill a piece to see

old Grandma Clark. It must have been four o'clock when we came by the Barrett farm and there sat Lydia on the piazza all alone. Father likes his joke, so he called out, 'Is Jim going to stay to tea?' Lyddy looked sort of surprised and said he hadn't been there. We thought she was putting it on, but it was true — he hadn't set foot on the place.

"Father was worried then, for he thinks the world of Jim, so we went along home at a pretty lively clip, wondering all the way what had happened to the lad, and considering what 'twas best to do. Well, when we reached the house, Jim was sitting in a piazza chair. He wasn't exactly sitting, either — it looked like he just fell into it. He was white as a ghost and dripping with sweat and his clothes looked as if he got them off a scarecrow! He'd blundered into that swamp and lost his sense of direction, and had been five mortal hours trying to get out. Big, strong fellow that he was, he was just completely tuckered! It was a couple of days before he felt like himself again. He didn't get half so badly scratched as Max, but then he had the use of both hands, and it was earlier in the year when the thorns weren't so well grown. But it does beat all how Molly ever got so far in! That's more than I can understand and I don't suppose it'll be explained to us."

When the three returned from the Tyler house, the invalid's room was in spotless order, and Max, sitting

up in bed, was enjoying his breakfast, though amused at his awkward efforts to feed himself with his left hand.

"Hullo, Molly!" he called cheerfully. "Good-morning, Hope. Molly, do come here."

Molly wouldn't; she did not like cousin Max's looks. Cotton, salve and sticking-plaster did not improve his countenance, while his right arm, shoulder and hand resembled the wrappings of an Egyptian mummy.

"You fickle little Molly!" said Max. "I'm afraid you judge people wholly by personal appearance!"

"Molly's an ungrateful wretch!" June declared. "Honestly, I think she ought to be taken in hand."

"Oh, June, don't try to argue with her," expostulated Hope. "She's perfectly impossible anyway to-day!"

"June," said Mrs. Tyler, "can't you take Molly off somewhere and entertain her for an hour or so? Hope's been awake with her more or less all night and she's tired. Max is settled now for the morning and he can read or perhaps Hope will read to him."

"Hope does look tired," said June. "Come along, Molly; let's go fishing. I'll rig a pole and line for you and we'll sit on the pier and fish for a whale."

June started for the lake with Molly trotting gleefully beside him, perfectly happy at this prospect. Mrs. Tyler left for home, after telling Hope to rest and take no thought for the remainder of the day.

Max was not as unwilling to stay in bed as Mrs. Tyler imagined. He was very tired and his scratches were sore and aching. It had not occurred to him that Hope would act upon the suggestion of reading aloud and he glanced up in surprise as she came in.

Hope did not look like herself; she was pale, with a set, determined expression on her face. To her cousin's astonishment, she came straight to his side.

"Max, I want to tell you how sorry I am that I've been so hateful to you. I've been dreadful — and it was my Molly! Max, can you ever forgive me?"

"Oh, Hope!" exclaimed the startled Max, but Hope suddenly dropped to her knees and buried her face in the side of the bed.

"Don't say a word till I tell you! I didn't want you to come and I made up my mind that you would be horrid. You see June and I have been such chums and always before, I've been enough for him in the summers. And because you were coming, he made me give up a plan I'd set my heart on, and I blamed you for that. And I hated so to hear you always talking about Connie and what sport she is, as if you liked her ever so much! Only yesterday I said it was your fault if Molly was lost and then you went through that dreadful brier! Oh, Max, I've spoiled your whole summer!"

More than once, Max tried to stop his cousin, but it was useless and finally he let her say what she would.

Like most boys, he had an inherent distaste for any scene. He wanted no prolonged apology or explanation. In his opinion a brief "Sorry!" was all that was necessary.

"I've always been horrid!" Hope went on. "And June made it all the worse because he would give up to me for the sake of peace. I sometimes think he doesn't know how hard it is for me because he doesn't easily get angry himself."

"Well, I do, Hope, and I know just how hard it is," said Max unexpectedly.

Hope lifted her head and stared at him. "You!" she exclaimed. "Why, you're as bad as June! You can't make me believe that you are quick-tempered, Max."

"If you'd known me all my life, you'd believe it! Indeed, I used to be 'something fierce' as June says. If I've really improved to that extent, Dad and St. George haven't labored with me in vain!" said Max quaintly. "Hope," he added, "I fancy the real reason you and I haven't hit it off any better is because down at the bottom we are a good deal alike."

Hope continued to look at him in amazement. "You are not one bit like me!" she exclaimed passionately. "I've been trying all my life to keep my temper and just see what a mess I make of it. You never really lose control of yours!" she ended miserably.

In spite of his intense dislike for the whole situation, her despondent tone moved Max to sympathy.

"I jolly well had to learn to keep my temper, Hope!" he explained frankly. "You see I've lived mostly with men, and men who hadn't much time to waste over a kiddie who flew into tantrums. When I was old enough to realize that my explosions bothered my dad, I tried to get hold of myself for his sake. He's such a crackerjack, you know! Then, if I blew off steam when St. George was around, he used to take me by the shoulders and tell me to stop. If I said I couldn't, he would remark in the most positive manner; 'Oh, yes, you can, and you will at once!' Under those circumstances, little Max usually did stop!"

At this graphic word picture, Hope could not suppress an hysterical laugh.

"After all, it was Uncle Dick who helped me most," Max went on thoughtfully. "He had more time. Dad was away all the winter that I was ten and I stopped with the Lisles. I was forever getting angry and then being frightfully sore over it. So Uncle Dick and I made a plan to help me learn to keep steady. He's been an army officer, you know, and though he's lost one arm, he's an expert fencer. The agreement was that he was to teach me to fence, but that after we once began we were not to stop unless I was fencing with perfect self-control, at least outwardly. The

point of the whole thing was that no fellow can fence decently unless he's as cool as a cucumber. Those lessons were mighty strenuous! I'd get hot and fire my foil across the room. Then Uncle Dick would simply wait with the utmost courtesy for me to pick it up. He never rowed me or pi-jawed me in the least; he only waited. Five minutes or an hour was all the same to Uncle Dick, but pick it up I had to and begin again."

Max stopped. He had a vivid recollection of the tempestuous, curly-headed little lad who sometimes did take the full hour.

"I admire Uncle Dick tremendously," Max continued after the pause. "And when a man like Colonel Lisle treats a chap as he treated me, why the chap's a beastly cad if he doesn't try to come up to it! By the end of the winter Uncle Dick couldn't make me angry while fencing. He could disarm me and make a dozen touches and I could grin and keep steady. It was the greatest help you can imagine, and I've always loved Uncle Dick for his patience with me over that. He sometimes jokes about it now and tells me that for a kiddie with brown hair I did have the reddest-headed temper he ever knew!"

Hope smiled rather tearfully, finding it indeed a comfort to know that Max's habitual serenity was not wholly a happy gift of nature.

Max, too, was silent, sincerely wishing the inter-

view at an end. A prisoner in bed, he was helplessly at his cousin's mercy.

"Don't you ever get angry now?" she inquired suddenly.

"Well, I should say!" drawled Max in his funny English manner. "At times this summer you've stirred me up considerably yourself, Hope! But you know, I think it's frightfully decent of you to own up like this and there's some of the summer still left and we're all going to be chums now!"

Hope choked and started to her feet, for through the open window floated the sound of voices.

"There's Mrs. Walker and the girls! Oh, I don't want to see them!"

"Go in your room and lie down and I'll call to them that you are feeling poorly and don't want to be disturbed," said Max quickly. "But, Hope, do shake hands with me. Sorry it has to be my left one, but that's nearer my heart, you know."

Hope brushed away her tears, returned the cordial pressure, and fled to her own room. She heard her cousin call in response to Mrs. Walker's greeting and then the voices were promptly hushed.

When she came out after an hour's rest, Charlotte and Anstice had gone with June in the boat; Nan rowing and patient Charlotte trying to keep Molly still and amused. Max was lying against his pillows and Mrs. Walker had evidently been reading aloud. As

Hope entered, both looked up to greet her. Max's frank gray eyes had a pleasant smile that brought a lump into Hope's throat. She had seen that expression many times, but this was the first occasion that it had been there for her.

"Are you feeling less tired, Hope?" asked Mrs. Walker, drawing her down for a kiss. "Have you been asleep?"

"No," replied Hope, "but I feel ever so much better."

"I think that doctor puts on too much side!" Max burst out emphatically. "Here he made me give him my word of honor to stop in bed until he came. It's nearly noon and he hasn't turned up! I believe he never intended to come this morning and I call it a mean trick!"

Mrs. Walker laughed at his belligerent tone. "I was just thinking that you'd been very meek and good about staying quiet, but it seems that after all it was only the peace of a volcano."

"I'm not keen on stopping in bed. I had four months of it last winter and spring. Oh, well, everybody was tremendously good to me. The nurses were simply dandy and people sent loads of flowers, and Dad came every single day. It wasn't half bad, only they would never let me know my temperature and most of the fun of being ill is knowing how bad you are! After I grew better I had the time of my life. Dad

really had the worst of it, for when I was able to take account of him again, he had developed twenty-six gray hairs. I counted them twice with great care, and he said he'd always expected me to be the cause of their turning. I fancy I was!" concluded Max merrily. He had meant to cheer Hope, and from her expression, was succeeding.

"There come Molly and the girls. Isn't Molly dreadful to-day? I believe she's trying to see how naughty she can be!" said Hope, going to meet them.

Anstice had her hands full of water-lilies and Charlotte was coaxing rebellious Molly. Both greeted Hope affectionately.

"Aren't the lilies lovely? Did you get them in the little bay?"

"No, in the passage through to the other lake. Is there a dish to put them in? And isn't Max going to get up? We thought we could play games with him."

"Not until after the doctor has been here," said Hope, opening the china closet. "There's a dish, Nan."

"Hope!" exclaimed Charlotte. "I wish you'd give Molly a lump of sugar! Really, she's desperately cross, and perhaps it will sweeten her disposition."

Anstice giggled, but Hope took the suggestion seriously.

"I'll give her one, but I doubt if it makes her be-

have any better. There, Molly, it's the biggest one in the bowl."

Molly ate it and promptly demanded another.

"We might have expected that!" sighed Hope. "It is time to go down for dinner, and then, if Molly doesn't mend her manners, I'm going to put her to bed. It won't do her any harm and really, she's so bad I think she must be sick."

CHAPTER XXII

A LOAF OF CAKE

MAX refused to make any further promises about remaining in bed, and the next day, with some assistance from his cousin, dressed and again presented himself to the world. The scratches on his face were much improved and his other wounds were less painful, while his spirits did not seem to have suffered at all. Dr. Leonard had appeared late on the previous afternoon and declared another visit unnecessary. Molly, however, still declined to have anything to do with a person whose face was so disfigured with ointment and cotton. Molly herself was in a better temper on this bright morning and less of a trial to Hope, who had been nearly distracted between her own troubles and her cross little sister.

"Molly's hair does look dreadfully," she remarked to June. "Would you cut the other side to match?"

June shook his head. "I'd leave it till Mother comes. She will trim it and it will soon grow again."

Hope had risen with the intention of making cake for tea. She had never tried, but surely it was a

simple matter to follow a rule, and after the dishes were washed, she opened the only cookbook the house afforded and went to work. Molly climbed on a chair to watch and her small fingers promptly investigated the sugar bowl.

"Oh, darling, you mustn't taste things! June, can't you take Molly with you?"

"I can take her, but she makes such a row over the way Max looks. Little heathen, you ought to be ashamed! You may yell if you like, but if you are going with me, you are going with Max!"

"Oh, leave her! I'll manage somehow."

"No, she is going, and she will be decent, too! It's time she was made to behave properly!"

Molly, like a wise child, realized that the moment had arrived when she must capitulate, and to the astonishment of every one, she seized Max's hand and announced her intention of going only with him.

"Well, you are the limit!" commented June. "You've been pretending all the time. We're not going far, only to the pier where I mean to sandpaper the other paddle and Molly can fish."

Hope thought her little sister had fished to some purpose when an hour later June returned, carrying Molly dripping wet from top to toe.

"She managed to fall off the pier," he growled as he stood her in the kitchen sink, prepared, since his sister had been so persistently unlike herself all sum-

mer, to hear an annoyed comment on his carelessness. To his surprise and relief, Hope only sighed over Molly's condition.

"Begin to undress her, will you? My cake is ready to take out of the oven, and after I do that I'll be right there."

June removed Molly's sandals and socks and tickled her pink feet, evoking contortions which resulted in her sitting down in the half-filled dish-pan. Luckily its contents were clean and nearly cold, but the water was distributed about equally over June and the floor. Hope, in horror, almost dropped her cake, and Molly was uncertain whether to laugh or cry. Since June and cousin Max were both making fun of her mishap, she concluded that it must be a new kind of joke, and added her quota to their mirth.

"Carry her into my room!" commanded Hope. "I'm ready now."

Molly did not seem to be at all the worse for her double ducking as Hope dressed her in dry garments and took her on her lap to rub the damp curls. The boys were still in the kitchen where June, like the good brother he was, had kindly mopped the spilled water. After a silence, Hope heard a suppressed chuckle.

"It is a weird-looking cake," said June softly.

"She must have made it with scrambled eggs," commented Max in the same cautious whisper.

Hope's face suddenly flushed, but she bit her lip and went on rubbing Molly's hair.

"I guess we'd better take out a life insurance policy before we tackle that!" June added with a sudden laugh in which his cousin joined.

"I think that will do now, Molly. Run out in the sunshine and it will be dry in a minute or two," said Hope, putting the little sister down.

Molly trotted into the kitchen, closely followed by Hope. The boys started and looked apologetic as she came in.

Hope walked to the table and surveyed her masterpiece. It was of a level thinness, and while brown, had a peculiar curdled appearance that did suggest scrambled eggs. Inspecting it gravely, she broke off a corner. The inside showed soggy and yellow.

"I don't know what I did that wasn't right, but it evidently isn't the way it should be. It hasn't any salt and I forgot the flavoring but that can't make it look so queer. Perhaps," she added, "I ought not to have stirred in the eggs the way I did."

"Didn't you beat them?" Max inquired. "I've seen Rosalia, Aunt May's cook, whisking eggs when she made cake."

"No, I didn't," Hope replied so pleasantly that June stared at them both. "The rule said to, but I was in a hurry and I thought it probably wouldn't matter. It isn't fit for a pig to eat. After this, we'll go to

Mrs. Tyler's as Mother said. It's plain that I don't know as much about cooking as I supposed I did."

"Good for you, Polly Anne!" June exclaimed cordially, convinced by the evidence of his own ears that whether or not it had been "right about face" with Hope, she and Max had at least declared an armistice. "Anyway, you can't expect to make cake like Mother's right off the first time you try. If you had beaten the eggs, probably it would be plastered to the oven roof, it would be that light and airy."

"We'll tell Mrs. Tyler at dinner that we'll come all the time till Mother's home again," Hope repeated firmly.

June gave his sister a look of unmixed approval, but knew better than to comment upon her sudden return to her usual self. "Where is that child?" he demanded, realizing that Molly had disappeared.

Molly was trying to climb into the hammock and bitterly resented any interference.

"I shall not have another moment's peace while Mother's gone!" sighed Hope. "I suppose it wouldn't be right to tie Molly up, but it would be a relief, for I don't dare let her out of my sight!"

"I don't want Aunt Helen to come until I look a little less like a walking advertisement for a doctor!" muttered Max as he went out to look for Charlotte. Somewhat to his own surprise, he had received that morning a reply to the letter he had written his

father's lawyer about Mr. Lemon. It was only by chance that the letter found Mr. Ames still in Boston. Either its naïve boyishness interested him or he had given it due attention because the writer was the son of a valued client. At any rate, he had gone to considerable trouble to secure the information wanted, and the reply was friendly and personal.

From it Max learned that the present well-known James Marshall was a man still under forty-five but that his father, another James, had been one of the founders of the Saguenay Club and in the habit of making yearly fishing trips in Canada. Part of the property to which the younger James fell heir consisted of valuable timber land in the region beyond Chicoutimi.

Mr. Ames thought that the story told Max by Mr. Lemon might have some foundation in truth. He gave, however, a cautious and rather guarded opinion to the effect that young Mr. Marshall would probably demand the deed of gift executed by his father before giving the tale any consideration. Should the deed be forthcoming, the claim would doubtless be recognized, even though, as Mr. Ames strongly suspected, the transfer had never been recorded. That fact could be ascertained only by a search of the Canadian registry offices. At that date, Quebec was probably the nearest place where such registration could be made.

As things stood, Mr. Marshall was the legal owner

of the land unless the deed should prove otherwise. Even if it could be found, the lapse of time would complicate the affair, but Mr. Marshall was an honorable man, and one who would respect definite proof of an evident intention on his father's part.

This letter and the lawyer's matter-of-fact acceptance of their theory excited both Max and Charlotte, but neither saw what was to be done next.

"I suppose it would come very dear to have those records in Quebec searched," Max remarked thoughtfully. "Evidently that is the only thing that will help, since we don't know where the deed is."

"Perhaps Mr. Lemon could pay for having it done," suggested Charlotte.

"'It may be so, but I doubt it!'" quoted Max derisively. "Not much, Carlotta! But we are up against it now! Dad might think me rather an expensive luxury if he got a big bill from Mr. Ames for having those registers looked over, especially if there wasn't any record there! No, I don't quite see even Dad approving my philanthropic motives to that extent."

"You certainly ought to ask him first," declared Charlotte sensibly.

"And that's so easy, seeing he's in India! I wish I knew how much it would cost."

"Mr. Ames could probably tell you."

"I fancy it would depend on how long it took,"

Max went on. "No, Carlotta, the only thing is to locate that deed, and if we find Kitty, we shall probably find it, too. It's high time we heard from her."

"It's not likely she took it," remarked Charlotte, convinced, though she could not say on what grounds, that a woman leaving home in such haste, and encumbered with a baby, would not bother to take with her a document of no value to her personally. Charlotte did not feel as sanguine as Max about Kitty's return or about the identity of Mrs. Lemoine. Nor was she wholly in sympathy with his desire to discover this deed. With a wisdom beyond her years, she doubted if it would be any real kindness to the old man, whose clouded brain was probably incapable of understanding changed circumstances. Recovery of the property, though rightfully his, might only make him the prey of unscrupulous men.

Charlotte did not put her doubts into words, appreciating, though not wholly approving Max's point of view. To him, it was a problem to be solved, a game he wanted to play and win.

CHAPTER XXIII

ON THE BUCKBOARD

"I HAVE a plan to propose," said June as they started for breakfast on the morning of the day when Mrs. Ralston was expected. "Mr. Tyler has to drive into town this afternoon to fetch Mother —"

Hope interrupted him. "I was thinking of that. Why don't you and Max go, too? You can just as well as not, for he will take the double-seated carriage if you ask him."

"My plan is even more altruistic. Let's ask him to take the big buckboard, and everybody go, Charlotte and Nan and Molly, of course."

"Oh, that would be fun!" exclaimed Hope, her face brightening. "I haven't been to town since we came. It would be nice for us to meet Mother at the steamer."

"There's no reason why we shouldn't. If Mrs. Walker wants to go, there will be room for her, but probably she won't care for so long a drive."

"Nan and Charlotte will be delighted. We were saying yesterday that it had been nine weeks since we

even saw a college ice, and we positively need some new fancy work."

"Max looks decent enough now so that I'm not ashamed to take him where people will see him," June went on. "To be sure, his forehead is skinning in spots and he has a gouge in one cheek, but he looks somewhat better since he's been able to wash his face."

Max merely grinned. June's teasing never annoyed him and it was a relief that the salve and bandages were gone, revealing only a few bad scratches.

"Otherwise we would leave him at home. You can bob up Molly's curls somehow so she'll look less as if she'd been scalped, and we'll all be gay."

Charlotte and Anstice were enthusiastic over the plan and Mrs. Walker consented at once to their being of the party, though she did not herself feel equal to a trip of sixteen miles over the country roads. Mr. Tyler, who always enjoyed being with the young people, willingly consented to take two horses and the light, easily-running buckboard.

"June, you do think of such nice things!" said Hope appreciatively when the plans were settled.

"That idea came to me in the night. At first I thought it was one of Max's pets, one of his what-do-you-call-'em? — his earth spirits, but I soon saw it wasn't for it had wheels!" replied her brother merrily.

When the party assembled that afternoon ready for their trip to town, they frankly stared at one another. The girls in pretty ginghams and shady hats hardly seemed the same trio who had so long been seen only in blue skirts and middy blouses, while the change in the boys was equally marked.

"Max, I didn't know you were so good-looking!" commented June. "Not since the day you wore your wedding garments have I seen such splendor! And a straw hat — ye gods and little fishes — wait till I locate mine!"

"You look slightly glorious yourself!" retorted his cousin.

"Red silk socks and a tie to match!" teased June. "There is no denying it, Max; you are rather a handsome fellow!"

The girls laughed and Max pursued June with a blush on his tanned face and wrath in his gray eyes.

"Look here, boys!" called Mr. Tyler. "I'm ready to start and there's no time for skylarking. Call it off now; you can fight it out later. You boys look enough alike anyway to be taken for own brothers, so June's throwing bouquets at himself as well as Max."

"I'll get even with you!" threatened Max as he gave up the pursuit of his laughing cousin and jumped on the buckboard.

"Max would have made such a pretty girl!" June went on as he seated himself as far as possible from

the object of his remarks. "It is a shame that his eyes and complexion should be wasted on a boy!"

June forgot that a buckboard is provided by a continuous step by which a person at the back may reach the front without stopping the horses or stepping to the ground. The next second he was nearly choked by a gray-clad arm that came around his neck, nor would Max release his hold until June promised to refrain from further personal remarks.

"We'll go round through the village," said Mr. Tyler when peace was restored. "I want to see Abe Nelson a minute and one of you boys can be getting the mail."

The buckboard drew up before the single shop afforded by the village, a little country store of the most miscellaneous character, where everything from a tape-needle to a plow-share could be purchased. There was no order or arrangement on its shelves, where jars of ancient candy jostled patent medicines, and grass-seed and insect powder lived harmoniously with Quaker oats and dried currants. One corner was partitioned off for a postoffice and as June dashed in, he saw that the box set aside for the use of the Ralston cottage was well filled.

"Max gets the most of course," he reported as he distributed the mail. "Our foreign correspondence as usual is extensive, but here's one for him with a United States stamp! This must be investigated!"

"You robber!" exclaimed his cousin. "Here, give me my letters, you grinning ape!"

"Considering how near is our relationship, those are not nice names to call me!" retorted June, still retaining his grasp on the bundle of mail.

There was a sound of parting paper and one fat letter split open, showering a number of small envelopes upon Anstice and Molly.

"Oh, say! I didn't mean to!" apologized June, leaning over to help collect them. "Well, what next! What *are* you going to do with flower seeds? 'Wallflowers!' 'Auricula!' What on earth is auricula, anyhow?"

"Just you give those to me!" commanded Max, laughing, though his color had risen. "There are a few things you can't find out, little boy!"

The papers of English flower seeds were passed from one to another until they found a final resting place in Charlotte's lap. Max was intent upon his rescued letters. After a hasty inspection, he thrust them into a pocket, reserving two only for immediate reading; one postmarked at Calcutta and the other bearing the American stamp.

Charlotte examined the seed packages curiously. "Auricula seems to be a kind of primrose," she said in an undertone. "Max, what are you going to do with these?"

Max looked up from his father's letter. The others

were intent upon a story Mr. Tyler was telling and there seemed no probability of being overheard.

"Don't you tell, then, Carlotta! When I came, I stopped over night at Newhope. The woman at the farmhouse where I stayed had a lovely garden and she didn't have much else. She was dandy to me, and so I asked Aunt May to send me some seeds of English flowers to give her."

"She'll like them," said Charlotte appreciatively. "That is such a nice thing to do, Max!"

"It isn't much," replied Max, coloring a little. "She charged hardly anything for putting me up. I wanted to get hold of some Dutch bulbs, but I couldn't think of a way."

Mr. Tyler turned off on the Blueberry mountain road, the two powerful horses trotting along as if the buckboard was no weight behind them. Molly, on the middle seat between Hope and Anstice, was quite wild with pleasure and excitement. Hope had looped the disfigured curls with ribbon and no one could notice any deficiency.

"Carlotta," inquired Max as he folded his second letter, "Mrs. Tyler has an extra room, hasn't she?"

"Yes, a pleasant little one at the back of the house."

"This letter is from Mr. Thornley. He was in New York when he wrote. He says if I can find him a place to stay, he'll come here for a few days next week."

"I'm sure he could have that room, but does that mean you'll have to go back earlier than you expected?"

"St. George doesn't say a word about his plans; he just asks if I can arrange for him."

Hope overheard and turned. "Max, if that's Mr. Thornley you are speaking of, I know Mother will want him to come to our house."

"That's just what he won't do," Max replied pleasantly. "It would be different if you were in your own home, but here you are only camping."

Hope looked troubled, but did not know how to meet the emergency. "Please don't speak to Mrs. Tyler till Mother knows."

"No, I won't," agreed Max, "but I am afraid St. George won't come if he thinks he is making the least trouble for Auntie. For that reason he would really prefer to be at the Tylers'."

"He'll have the nightmare if he sleeps in that room," declared Anstice. "The wall-paper is the exact colors of a squashed worm!"

"Nan, how can you think of such awful things!" expostulated Charlotte.

"It is," repeated her positive sister. "The man who designed that paper must have walked on caterpillars for weeks before he made it. You just step on the next one you meet and you'll see that it is true!"

"I certainly shall not, and, Nan, you're really dreadful! Mamma says she can't imagine how you ever think of the fearful things you say. Max, I wish you wouldn't laugh at her. She's so silly that she isn't even funny!"

"Mamma ought not to have named me for my two grandmothers!" went on Anstice. "It's enough to give anybody queer ideas to be called Anstice Deborah! It's strange I'm not queerer than I am, and I feel sure I shall never improve. People ought to be careful what they name babies!"

At this, Charlotte laughed with Max. After all, Anstice's odd speeches possessed a certain charm.

There were several steep hills on the road, one in particular being so precipitous that they all walked down, with the exception of Molly and Hope, who remained clutching her little sister and looking somewhat fearfully at the broad flanks of the horses as they pulled back and curved out on either side of the pole. The buckboard reached the bottom in perfect safety and waited a moment for the others to come up. Anstice had rushed into a meadow for goldenrod with which she decorated her own and Hope's Panama hats. Charlotte preferred late daisies for the red Mexican one she was still wearing.

The houses grew more frequent and a smell of salt came into the air. Soon the country road changed to a village street with pleasant houses and shady yards

on either side; saw and paper mills appeared, then a livery stable and a row of business blocks.

"Is that an electric car?" June exclaimed. "Hold on, will you, Mr. Tyler, till I go and embrace it?"

"There's another!" laughed Hope. "Hurry, June; it will escape!"

"It is so long since I have seen one that I really feel afraid of it!" sighed June, sinking back on the seat.

Mr. Tyler drew up before a dry-goods store.

"The steamer will be along in about three-quarters of an hour and the wharf is the other end of town. So all of you that are going down there, want to be in the buckboard a sharp forty minutes from now. The best ice-cream and candy place is that one over there."

The entire party started for the shop indicated, but Charlotte, half across the street, turned.

"Won't you come too, Mr. Tyler? We'd like to have you."

The farmer shook his head. "I'm not much on sweet stuff, Charlotte. I've an errand here in the hardware store and I must keep my eye on the team."

The confection of that special summer was styled a "hinkey dee," which, being interpreted, is a rich chocolate ice over which melted, unsweetened chocolate has been poured. A "hinkey dee dee" is the same dainty with the addition of chopped nuts.

"I know I shall not like that," remarked Charlotte, regarding doubtfully the brimming glasses that the

clerk was filling. I don't care so very much for chocolate. Nan, let me taste yours?"

Anstice complied and Charlotte made a face.

"That's all I want. I'll have mine strawberry."

"It's licking good!" remarked Anstice calmly.

"Nan, what an expression!" remonstrated the shocked Charlotte.

"It is the exact word for it!" declared Max merrily, as the thick, sticky chocolate clung in ropes to his spoon. "That is precisely what it is, Nan."

Molly insisted on sampling Hope's hinkey dee dee, but a single taste was enough and she returned to her plate of pink strawberry cream, quite pleased that it was like Charlotte's.

"I could eat another," proclaimed June thoughtfully.

"June, you can't!" Hope protested in horror. "At any rate, don't!"

"So could I!" announced Max. "I could do nicely with another myself! Let's wait till the steamer comes and then bring Auntie."

"I shall be ready for two by that time," observed his cousin, "but we'll wait by all means."

After their visit to the drug-store, the young people separated; Hope and Anstice going in search of fancy work, while Charlotte looked at post-cards, Max at some finely colored photographs, and June and Molly inspected all the windows.

Mr. Tyler was waiting on the buckboard at the appointed time and watched with amusement as they came hurrying from different directions. All had packages and Molly was waving in glee a toy canoe paddle ornamented with a painted Indian's head that her cousin had given her.

"Where's Max?" asked Hope. "Charlotte, wasn't he with you?"

"He was in the picture shop, but he went out before I did," replied Charlotte, standing up for a look around.

June produced a tin horn and blew a long blast that apparently attracted the attention of every one within hearing, with the exception of Max. The main street of the little town was gay with buckboards and summer visitors.

"The steamer is signaling," said Mr. Tyler, gathering his reins. "We'll collect Max on the way back, but it's time we started. June," he added in a lower tone, "sit down and be easy. Hasn't it struck you that when your mother sees Molly, she will ask about her curls? It's pretty certain, too, that Hope's going to cry. There's a story to be told, and it will be easier for Max if he isn't in at its telling."

June's eyes returned a look of comprehension. He knew that his cousin greatly dreaded having attention called to his part in the affair.

"Don't worry about Max," said Mr. Tyler over his

shoulder to the girls. "He'll turn up when we come back."

The steamer was making fast to the wharf when the buckboard joined the crowd of gay vehicles on the broad pier, and Mrs. Ralston waved a glad greeting to them from the deck.

There were few passengers to come ashore, but many were waiting for the boat, which was bound for Boston. In a few minutes, Mrs. Ralston was being hugged and kissed by the young people.

"Molly darling, you're choking Mother! And how perfectly dear of you all to come and meet me! What a nice surprise! But where's Max, and why is Molly so grand with a big blue bow?"

To her mother's amazement, Hope burst into tears.

"Why, daughter, what's the trouble? Hope, dear child, *don't* — not here!"

It was evident there was a story to tell, and it was told, not by tearful Hope, but by June, Charlotte and Mr. Tyler as the buckboard slowly climbed the hill. Mrs. Ralston turned very pale and hugged Molly closely. Then she put an arm around Hope and choked a little.

"That's all," finished Mr. Tyler, "only Max, like most fellows who do really plucky things, doesn't want a fuss made over him."

Max was in sight as they turned again into the business street, standing on a corner, talking earnestly

with a tall, gray-haired gentleman. As he saw the approaching buckboard, he shook hands with apparent cordiality and waved a welcome to his aunt.

"Ever so glad to have you back again, Auntie!" he announced cheerfully as he swung himself on the step of the moving vehicle. Mrs. Ralston was still pale and Hope's tear-stained face and the general subdued appearance of the party showed that the story of Molly's runaway had been told.

Max leaned over to kiss his aunt and put a package on the seat between her and Hope.

"To eat going home—" he began, but he got no further, for Mrs. Ralston had seen the trace of those cruel thorns.

"Now, Auntie, *please* don't!"

"No, I won't, Max, not now, anyway, but you must let me kiss just that worst scratch."

"It will surely disappear at once!" said Max whimsically. "Did they tell you that we are going back to the chemist's?"

Mr. Tyler had already stopped before it.

"This is my treat," said Max, stepping from the running-board where he had been standing. "And Mr. Tyler must come too! You may have anything you want, but come you must."

"If I can have a plain ice-cream, I'll try it, but I don't want any of your chickadees, or whatever you call your fancy affairs," replied Mr. Tyler, pleased at

the invitation, and twisting the reins around the whip as he spoke.

By the time the second ice was eaten, the young people had recovered their spirits and left town happy and hilarious. Mrs. Ralston was still holding Molly tightly and smiling with a little difficulty, but Max, who was sitting with her on the middle seat, was in too happy a mood to be resisted. Hope had moved back with Charlotte, and Anstice, theoretically, was in front with June and Mr. Tyler, but practically, she was standing most of the time on the running-board, enjoying the unusual freedom.

As the dusk fell, the girls began to sing. Max desired to learn all the latest American songs, ostensibly with a view to teaching them to Connie. Molly went to sleep, still clutching the precious paddle which had once been dropped out, and more than once interfered with hat-brims.

"What terribly good chocolates!" declared Anstice when Max's box had been opened and passed to the front seat. "This has been a most refreshing day. It's such a lark to have a trip like this!"

"There's another thing you ought to take in," said Mr. Tyler, accepting a fat nougatine, "and that's the Ford picnic over on Silver Lake. It takes place every year. Judge Ford, who has a big place here on the shore, gives it on some land he owns down by the lake, and the whole country-side turns out. Every-

body comes and brings a basket lunch, and there's speeches and all sorts of doings. There are several boys' camps on the lake and they come and have swimming matches and boat races. We usually go over for a part of the day. It's next week Tuesday, and I'll take the whole crowd of you either in the buckboard or the hayrack. It'll be my treat, as Max says."

This proposition was received with enthusiasm and Anstice hugged Mr. Tyler on the spot.

"It will be such fun!" she sighed. "I know I shall not sleep a minute between now and next Tuesday!"

"Max," inquired June as a sudden recollection struck him, "who was your pick-up there in town — that gentleman with whom you were talking?"

His cousin gave an amused laugh. "I've had a previous invitation to this picnic. I met that gentleman once in Rome; it was Judge Ford himself!"

CHAPTER XXIV

A PICNIC AND A PIG

THE day of Judge Ford's annual picnic dawned clear and bright — perfect weather for a country gathering. Early in the morning farmers' teams began to pass the cottage, with everybody in the family, from grandmother down to the tiniest baby, bound for a day's outing.

Judge Ford owned a beautiful estate on the seashore some miles out of town, but spent only a few weeks there each season. He had been a country boy, and during years in the city where he had amassed a large fortune, never forgot his native village. Even in his absence the annual picnic on the shores of lovely Silver Lake was never omitted; prizes were provided for the sports and all who came were made welcome.

Mr. Tyler decided to take the buckboard, while the overflow could spill into the old carryall that was to convey Mrs. Tyler and Sally. Anstice and Hope gathered goldenrod and ferns to make knots for the headstalls of the horses who seemed quite conscious of their unusual grandeur. There was much running

back and forth between the gray cottage and the Tyler house before all preparations were made.

"I wish Mother felt like going," said Charlotte rather wistfully as she and Anstice finally arrived, quite ready for the start.

"So do I, dear, but it would be a hard day for her," replied Mrs. Ralston. "I wouldn't think of taking Molly, only Mrs. Tyler says she never stays later than three, and Molly and I are coming home with her."

The way to Silver Lake was new, but like all the Maine roads, one of beauty, up and down hill through the smiling country and the shadowy, evergreen woods. Long before they reached the lake, they found themselves part of a converging procession of conveyances of all descriptions, from automobiles and buckboards to hayracks and broken-down sulkies, for every one, near and far, turned out for the picnic. It was a red-letter day to the isolated farm people, and many summer visitors had driven out from town.

The grounds were rolling meadows sloping toward the lake. The grass had been cut, and large trees, isolated, or in groups, were standing here and there, while smaller ones fringed the shore. These afforded plenty of shade which was appreciated by the picnickers, and many families had already settled under them.

Booths had been erected, at one of which lemonade

was dispensed to all the thirsty; at another, peanuts and candy were given to the children. This term seemed to be very liberally interpreted by those in charge, for many who applied were far from their childhood, and yet none seemed to be refused. Several tents also shone white on the meadow. Here, enterprising dealers from town were attracting an interested crowd by their glittering displays of toys and cheap knicknacks, or offering a chance to purchase sandwiches and cake.

By far the greater part of the crowd was gathered around a temporary platform where were seated a band in uniform, the village minister and several of its best known citizens, with three or four gentlemen evidently from the city.

Our party arrived just in time to hear Judge Ford's speech. It was not long and was received with flattering enthusiasm. He spoke of the necessity of loyalty to birthplace and home, to the village, the state and the nation, and emphasized the fact that such loyalty was true patriotism. Judge Ford himself wore the little bronze button of the Grand Army of the Republic, and there were in the audience three or four veterans who proudly showed the same badge. There were younger men as well, who had enlisted during the war with Spain, and some of them had seen service; but there were many country lads who had never been ten miles from home. Listening to the

cultivated, convincing voice of the orator, they felt stir within them that indescribable consciousness of being a part of a tremendous whole.

The brief exercises were concluded by a band concert. During the speeches the young people had been standing together on the outskirts of the crowd. Max had thought that Judge Ford recognized him and was not surprised to see him approach through the scattering groups.

"Ah, here is my nice boy again!" said the judge, shaking hands cordially. "Introduce me to your friends, Maxfield. I'm delighted that you came over."

Max complied and the judge greeted them all warmly. "And have you had any candy?" he demanded the next moment.

"We didn't consider ourselves exactly as kiddies!" Max explained apologetically.

"You are mere infants in the eyes of the law! Come with me, everybody! I want to be sure you have my special mixture."

The "special mixture" proved to be gibraltars such as Salem makes only to order and a bag of fresh peanuts apiece.

"What are these?" Max asked, when they had said good-by to their kind host and he was at leisure to investigate the contents of the striped paper bag.

"Max Hamilton!" Anstice demanded in real con-

sternation, "do you mean to say you don't know peanuts when you see them?"

"But what if I see them for the first time?" asked Max quaintly.

Anstice's vivid little face turned positively pale. "Oh, what a forsaken place Italy must be! Why, if you eat them steadily all the rest of your life, you can never make up for these wasted years! When we went to town on the buckboard, didn't you notice the peanut roaster by the fruit stand?"

"I saw a tin thing making an unholy row with a steam whistle," Max replied, carefully inspecting the nuts.

"Well, that was it," said Anstice solemnly. "Next time, you'll know it. There's no squeal like that of a peanut! Take off that red husk, too. Now, see what you've missed!"

"They are prime!" Max acknowledged when speech was again possible. "Nan," he went on teasingly, "have you ever eaten fresh figs? Or ripe dates? Or picked oranges from the trees? You haven't? Oh, Nancy dear, when I think what you poor forsaken New Englanders have missed —"

The water sports were about to begin. Max and Charlotte, becoming separated from the others, sat down on the beach near the lake. The first number on the program was a tub race, the contestants being chiefly boys from different camps. Eight boys

started. It takes a cool head to paddle a tub before excited spectators and one tub after another came to grief. At last the one in the lead was an uncertain craft occupied by a little lad about ten, with a mop of curly, fire-red hair. He was paddling carefully and steadily, and being so light in weight, did not tip his tub nearly as much as did his heavier opponents. Evidently, he was a favorite, for the rest of the camp was cheering him enthusiastically.

"Go it, Red-head! Good for you, Brick-top! Keep it up, kid! Bully for Sunny Jim! Three cheers for the camp baby!"

"Good work, Jim!" shouted a man who appeared to be one of the councillors.

Sunny Jim was growing excited; his eyes were blazing; and he was only a yard from the line when a movement too eager tipped the tub and under he went, directly in front of Max and Charlotte. The water was not deep and he arose at once.

"Oh, tip it out and start again!" exclaimed Max encouragingly. "See, the next chap has capsized! You'll get there yet!"

Sunny Jim hesitated, biting his lip. He was only a little fellow and to empty that tub in water of such depth was more than his strength could accomplish. Sunny Jim was game however; he delayed but an instant, then waded ashore, towing the submerged tub; emptied it; climbed cautiously in and started again

amid the applause of the entire crowd. This time he rounded the stake and was received with shouts and cheers.

A canoe race followed, ending in an upset and four boys in the water; a mishap that merely added to their pleasure. It was succeeded by swimming and diving contests and feats, which, as one of the men announced, were open to all.

"Max, I wish you'd get out there and teach that land-lubber how to dive," said June's voice behind them. "I wish you would get into the water and show them how to do a thing or two."

"They are only kids," replied his cousin. "That little Sunny Jim dived in rather good form just then. I'd like to go in for the fun of it, but I wouldn't stand any show in these clothes."

"It's a shame you haven't your bathing suit. I want you to show off; you could beat them all. Jinks! They're catching a greased pig up here!"

Apparently they were *not* catching it, for great confusion was presently caused by the appearance of the small porker in the midst of the crowd. The commotion caused by its erratic movements was laughable; shrieks of alarm, mingled with screams of merriment, greeted its approach. Behind, came several panting pursuers, but as the quarry approached the lake, a girlish figure clad in immaculate white duck, darted suddenly from a group and flung itself upon the pig!

The next instant both were rolling in the dust, amid roars and cheers from the crowd and ear-splitting squeals from the captured porker.

"Gee! That was a clean tackle!" shouted June.

"Max!" exclaimed Charlotte in absolute horror. "*That* is Nan! *Look* at her!"

The next second, Anstice, her white dress covered with dirt and grease, arose from the ground, clutching her protesting victim firmly by the leg.

"Charlotte!" she called cheerfully, "come and help hold this pig!"

Her sister was too horrified to laugh, but Max, with tears streaming down his face, threw himself flat on the ground.

The crowd was howling with enjoyment, both over the undisturbed Anstice, and Charlotte, who looked literally petrified with consternation.

"What shall I do?" inquired Anstice of the spectators in general. "Let him go again?"

"He's yours," explained the grinning observers. "The one who catches him, has him."

"Mine? I don't want him!" protested Anstice. "Here, take him!" and she thrust the vociferous pig on a great gawky country lad who stood near. "You'd better take him by another leg. I'm afraid I've loosened this one."

The funny side of the situation struck Charlotte at

"*That* is Nan! *Look* at her!"—*Page 336.*

last, and leaning against the nearest tree, she wept with mirth.

"Nan, what *are* you going to do next?" she finally gasped.

"See what's going on up here," replied the literal Anstice, calmly wiping her hands on her skirt and not at all dismayed by the shocking state of her clothes.

Max sat up, looked after her and again lay prostrate.

"Nan certainly gets there every time!" he acknowledged, wiping the tears from his face. "If she isn't like Connie Lisle! That's exactly what Connie would have done!"

June, spent with laughter, had followed Anstice to watch some obstacle races that were beginning, and incidentally to be present in case that adventurous young lady should evince a further inclination to join in the sports, but Max and Charlotte stayed to note the mishaps of an inexperienced youth in a skiff. The boat was very tiny, but the amateur oarsman had taken with him two girls. Seated in the stern they quite overbalanced the frail craft, the bow of which cleared the lake by nine inches, while the water was almost touching the dresses of the passengers.

The young man betrayed the fact that it was his initial experience in handling oars, for he dipped them deeply and flourished them in the air with corresponding vigor. The boat was but a short distance from

land when its dangerous overweighted condition was discovered by the crowd and their shouts and comments made the girls uneasy. The oarsman turned and headed for shore while one of the girls stepped past him and stood in the bow ready to land. The young man attempted to come in with style and applied himself with energy to his task, but since no one was steering, he ran the craft violently into a submerged stone. The boat stopped so suddenly that the girl in the bow went headfirst into the lake; the one in the stern also tipped overboard, and the young man himself sprawled on his back in the bottom of the skiff.

In spite of the sympathy aroused for the two unfortunate victims of his inexperience, the incident was received with almost as much enthusiasm as Anstice's exploit. The angry and indignant girls, quite unhurt except for a wetting in the shallow water, walked ashore and disappeared in the crowd, paying no attention to their unlucky escort, who picked himself up amid jeers and bursts of laughter and made a second attempt to come ashore. As far as the boat was concerned, it was more successful, but in getting out, he stepped on the gunwale, and measured his length on the beach with both feet in the water.

Charlotte and Max laughed until they were tired. After the mishap he had brought on his unlucky companions, this seemed a fitting fate.

"I'm sorry for those girls!" said Charlotte. "Poor things! Oh, here is Hope!"

Hope had seen the accident and was very much amused.

"Mr. Tyler is ready to start any time we get together. Mamma and Molly went some time ago with Mrs. Tyler and Sally, and he says he wants to go before long. We are to meet at the buckboard."

The young people did not care to remain longer, and fifteen minutes later, were leaving the picnic ground behind.

"It has been an exciting day, but I am tired," said Charlotte, who found the springy buckboard luxurious after sitting so long on the lake bank. "Nan, where did you get that all-day sucker?"

"Bought it," replied Anstice calmly as she unwrapped the dainty. "There's one for everybody."

Charlotte looked askance at the penny lollipops stuck on sticks, but she did not refuse to eat one as long as all were doing so. The big, awkward sweetmeats prevented much conversation, but as they reached the crossroads, June gave a sudden exclamation.

"Oh, thunder! I promised Mother solemnly to stop off back there and go to the creamery after butter! Hold on, will you, Mr. Tyler? I'll have to go back."

"Sorry I haven't time to take you round that way,

but I must get home and 'tend to my chores," said the farmer, pulling in his horses.

"Max, it always takes two people to lug butter!" coaxed June.

"Oh, I'm coming," said his cousin, swinging himself from the still moving buckboard. "Mr. Tyler, I've had the time of my life."

The horses started, and the two turned back, while the buckboard soon traversed the mile to the Ralston cottage. The shadows of the elms were growing long across the pleasant lawn, where Mrs. Ralston and a strange gentleman were sitting while Molly played with the pussies.

CHAPTER XXV

MR. THORNLEY

"THAT must be Mr. Thornley!" thought Hope as she jumped from the buckboard after thanking Mr. Tyler for her pleasant day. Charlotte and Anstice waved greetings to Mrs. Ralston and the carriage vanished around the turn.

"Where are the boys, Hope?" exclaimed her mother. "Oh, they went for butter! I had quite forgotten. That is too bad, for here is Mr. Thornley."

Hope shook hands, feeling suddenly shy, though the newcomer did not seem in the least formidable. He was tall and thin, with brown hair and a clever, clean-shaven dark face. His mouth and chin looked stern and decisive, but he had a pleasant, rather whimsical smile, handsome teeth, a pair of kindly humorous blue eyes and a low, quiet voice. He possessed that same air which Hope had at once noted and rather resented in her cousin,— of being at ease under any conditions and in any place.

"Max will be so disappointed not to see you immediately," said Mrs. Ralston. "Hope," she added, turning to her daughter, "perhaps Mr. Thornley

would like to walk up to meet the boys, if you will show him the way."

"I should very much like to do so, if Miss Hope isn't too tired after her picnic," said Mr. Thornley with a smile bestowed in a manner that made the recipient feel it to be a personal favor.

"I am not in the least tired, I assure you, and I will go gladly."

They sauntered up the road, Hope feeling more and more attracted by this clever-looking Englishman. Little sentences from Connie's letter came into her mind. "St. George is just as nice and dear as always." "It is such a comfort to have St. George to talk with again, for he always listens so politely."

Hope had never before realized that a grown man could treat a very young girl with such gracious courtesy and consideration. She felt the charm of his manner and knew she had never talked better or more easily. He listened with such attention and responded so promptly to her effort to be entertaining that before they reached the turn, she had decided that Mr. Thornley was indeed the paragon Connie and Max had represented him.

They came to the cross-roads without meeting the boys, and leaned against the wall to wait, since it was doubtful from which direction they would come.

"May I smoke, Miss Hope?" inquired Mr. Thornley.

Hope gave permission, rather flattered by the courteous request, and watched while he filled and lighted his pipe.

"We mortals have our limitations," he remarked. "One of my many is my love for smoking. My boys think it a great joke when I make them promise not to use tobacco till they are grown, but I don't mind their being amused as long as they keep their promises."

"I think the boys are coming now," said Hope. "I hear their voices, but they won't see us until they are really upon us."

In a moment the voices had grown very near and to Hope's amusement, Mr. Thornley carefully put his eyeglasses in his pocket and placed his pipe on the wall behind him.

"You see I know Max of old," he said with a whimsical smile. "It seems prudent to remove any breakable appendages."

The boys came around the curve and saw the two by the wall.

"*Ecco San Giorgio!*" shouted Max and to the delight of both cousins he flung impetuous arms around Mr. Thornley's neck and embraced him in true continental fashion. Mr. Thornley, looking much amused, hugged Max heartily, and slapped him on the back.

"Max, you're the same old penny! Dear boy!" holding him off at arm's length. "How fit you are

looking! Not much like the skinny clothespole you were in Jersey."

"Why, I've gained eighteen pounds, St. George!"

"You do look well!" said Mr. Thornley, regarding him affectionately and then turning to June. "Max seems to have forgotten his manners, but this will be June."

June shook hands, conscious that those same kindly eyes were scrutinizing him in a way that indicated their owner to be quick in reading character and judging a new acquaintance.

"Oh, St. George!" exclaimed Max, still holding one of Mr. Thornley's hands in both his own, "I can't believe it's really you!"

"Have I changed so much since May?" asked the newcomer in a tone that made Hope laugh. He reached for his pipe as he spoke.

"Tremendously! I wouldn't know you but for that!" laughed Max, indicating the pipe. "And when did you see Connie last?"

"On the pier at Portrae. She and Mrs. Lisle were stopping all August. Connie and I had a delectable picnic on the Storr; didn't she write you?"

"Yes, she has written several times. And are you going back with me?"

"I can't say," replied Mr. Thornley, looking at him with a twinkle in his eyes. Max's face grew suddenly grave.

"You're not? Why, St. George, I never expected you'd play me such a trick as that! Why not?"

Mr. Thornley puffed imperturbably at his pipe. "I believe you've booked your passage on a Naples steamer. I am obliged to land in France."

"Oh, for what? I thought we'd have such sport going across together! St. George, couldn't you arrange your business better than that?"

Max was so disappointed that he failed to see the mischief in Mr. Thornley's eyes.

"You forget that I'm only a semi-detached man. If I go with you to Naples, who escorts my lady mother to Rome? The first duty of man is to take care of his mother."

"Where is Granny?" demanded Max suddenly.

"In Sussex. I intend to take a steamer to Cherbourg and meet her in Paris. Then we shall travel slowly down to Rome. There are some small towns in northern Italy that I had thought of visiting while Mother stops with her friends in Florence. It all depends on whether I run across a congenial traveling-companion."

June was smiling; he had already caught the drift of Mr. Thornley's remarks; but Max, still looking disturbed, was too troubled to grasp the situation.

"I was so sure of finding the one I wanted," Mr. Thornley continued in his low, even voice, "that I booked a whole cabin on that Cherbourg steamer."

Max looked up quickly. "St. George, you are a snide! Do you really want me?"

"Oh, no, Max, you'd be no end of a nuisance! I never give a fellow an invitation if there is the remotest chance of his accepting it!"

June laughed outright and Max hugged Mr. Thornley again.

"Careful, now!" warned that gentleman. "I'm rather fond of this meerschaum. My last pet pipe was smashed by Ronald MacIvor in a moment of similar intense feeling."

"I say, June!" demanded Max, turning to his cousin. "Isn't St. George no end of a peach, just as I said he was?"

"Max, you are embarrassing your cousin. You shouldn't ask him such personal questions. I've already decided that he is a nice boy, but he doesn't quite know whether he would like me for a schoolmaster."

This was so exactly the case that June blushed and settled the question on the spot.

"Yes, I should, Mr. Thornley," he said frankly. "Max has talked a great deal about you."

"That's most unwise of Max! I always feel prejudiced against a person I've heard extravagantly praised. By the way, Max, what is a 'peach'?"

"I thought Connie would wish to increase her

vocabulary, so I've learned some American slang to teach her," explained Max.

"Pray don't! Connie can talk slang in five different languages already, and that's enough. It makes one shudder to hear the things that innocent child can say! I haven't forgotten how you and she bribed a soldier at the *Castel San Angelo* to teach you some choice phrases."

"I haven't forgotten the lecture you gave us either!" said Max, laughing as he turned to his cousins. "Connie and I were feeling very pleased over these choice additions to our collection, so the next time we went out with St. George, we tried them on him. He was looking at the sunset but he stopped that and looked at us! Such a look! Then he spoke! His remarks were brief, but at their conclusion we felt like curled-up caterpillars. And there we didn't even know what the phrases meant! After we had recovered from the shock we invented a word for ourselves. It had many syllables but no meaning at all and belonged to no known language. It was as innocent as exclaiming 'Roast beef!' or 'Cream tarts!' We tried it on St. George, expecting great results, but apparently he didn't even hear it, which was a severe disappointment, for we were keen to have him ask what it meant. He wouldn't, and I've always suspected that he knew it was a sell and purposely re-

frained from asking. Oh, I do hope the Lisles will be in Rome this winter!"

"So do I!" Mr. Thornley agreed, "but I can't say I've ever thought you and Connie had a good effect on each other. Either one of you, taken alone, is more docile! Still, Connie is growing up, and Max occasionally shows gleams of reason!"

"Mr. Thornley is as nice as Max said, isn't he, Mamma?" remarked Hope that evening after a jolly supper at the Tylers' during which their guest had fraternized at once with all the young people. "Nan says he is quite the nicest man she ever met!"

"He is certainly agreeable," acquiesced Mrs. Ralston, glancing down the lake path where Mr. Thornley and the boys had started for a paddle. June had gone ahead to launch the canoe, and the others were following more slowly, Max talking eagerly, with an arm across Mr. Thornley's shoulder.

"He has a charming manner," she added. "I don't wonder Max is attached to him. I am glad that he seems very fond of Max."

"Max was so funny!" laughed Hope. "June said just that same thing and Max answered, 'Oh, St. George *likes* me, but he doesn't approve of me!' What do you suppose he meant?"

"Probably just that," replied her mother. "It is possible to love dearly a person of whom you do not absolutely approve. I imagine that Mr. Thornley

isn't blind to Max's shortcomings and probably feels some responsibility concerning them."

Hope's face grew thoughtful. Max had once spoken frankly to her of his attempts to overcome his worst faults. Hot-tempered Hope had been struggling bravely ever since Molly's runaway and had succeeded better than she expected. The tears came to her eyes as she remembered how absolutely without resentment her cousin showed himself; how he took it so completely for granted that they were "all to be chums." Hope had told the whole story to her mother, and been comforted and encouraged, but it was hard for her to think about the first of the summer, and to acknowledge that some of its consequences were unchangeable. She longed now for the close companionship with her cousin that she as well as June might have had, but that had been given to Charlotte. Hope was accepting this fact with as good a grace as possible.

Meanwhile the canoe was skimming rapidly over the quiet lake, with hardly a sound from the paddles.

"You may smoke, you know, St. George," said Max mischievously.

"Thanks! I really don't care to," was the imperturbable reply. "How beautiful it all is!"

Both boys grew enthusiastic over this tribute to their loved lake. Mr. Thornley was very appreciative and saw new charms at every turn. They skirted the en-

tire shore, paddling under water in Indian fashion most of the way. As they approached Mystery Point, some shadowy forms on the sand attracted attention.

"If I'm seeing straight, those are deer!" said Mr. Thornley in a whisper. "Can't you draw nearer, boys? Softly!"

Very silently the canoe crept closer, and came within fifty feet. The approach was so noiseless that the deer, a doe and a half-grown fawn, did not notice anything unusual. As the canoe stopped off shore, the doe actually walked into the water to eat lilypads in the little bayou. For fully fifteen minutes the watchers looked on silently, but at last some slight noise, or some change in the wind made their presence known. With a snort and splash the doe rushed ashore, disappearing in the underbrush with her fawn close at her heels.

"Isn't that great!" exclaimed Max. "Now, I have seen wild deer as well as a bear."

"If it were not so nearly dark, they would have seen us. That's an interesting experience," said Mr. Thornley. "A bear, Max? I haven't heard that tale."

He heard it then from both boys and to their great pleasure proposed another night on the mountain.

"There are stacks of things we must do in these ten days," said Max. "Oh, it will be sport to climb Blueberry again!"

"And there's that picnic we're going to have," added June.

"Life is going to be a continued picnic from now till the time we leave, St. George," explained Max. "But this is a most particular kind of picnic, which my American cousins call a 'bacon bat.' Nan says she hasn't had a chance to wear her best hat all summer and she is going to wear it then. Carlotta says she shall not!"

"I'll bet on Nan!" announced June calmly. "Nan knows what she wants in this world, whether it happens to be a hat or a pig!"

"If I live to be a hundred I shall never forget this afternoon!" laughed Max, convulsed at the mere recollection. "Mrs. Walker sent Nan to bed for riding a cow — what will she do when she hears of her catching a greased pig?"

"Whatever it is, Nan will bob up serenely," grinned June. "Let's plan for Saturday night on the mountain. If it's clear and not too cold, we'd better take advantage of the weather when we can get it. And there should be a full moon. We'll come down early enough the next morning so Mother won't mind its being Sunday."

Max paid little attention to his cousin's plan. He had stopped paddling and converted the gunwale of the canoe into an imaginary keyboard upon which he was improvising some melody.

"Look here, young Paderewski!" began June teasingly. "Has it hit you hard? Where does it hurt worst?"

"I believe I can do it!" Max declared. "Wait until I get my hands on that old tin pan at the Tylers' that masquerades as a piano!"

Max would give no further explanation, though more than once he dropped his paddle to impress on the summer night through his sensitive finger tips, the silent melody that haunted his brain.

"Mr. Thornley," June inquired at length, "is Max often taken in this way?"

Mr. Thornley laughed. "Rome has many magic voices for those who have ears to hear. There are times, not infrequent, when Max listens altogether too eagerly."

"You mustn't tell tales out of school," said Max merrily. "Really, now, if June was there, he would listen himself! Some days the air is full of their calling. I often hear the Pantheon above all the noise of the streets."

"I guess it would be a bad place for me!" commented June dryly. "I'm not used to hearing things at night."

"You can hear them in the daytime quite as distinctly," said Mr. Thornley mischievously. "In fact, they are most plainly audible in the morning about the time for school to begin!"

"I perceive!" grinned June. "In other words, I catch on! So little Max has been known to play truant?"

"I haven't for a long time!" protested his cousin. "St. George, that was distinctly unfair! Besides, I promised I wouldn't do it again. That was mean! I shall not let either one of you hear this great musical event which is going to come off as soon as I make connections with a piano."

Charlotte was the only one who heard it, and she listened with interest while Max, after shutting the door and seating himself at the piano, ran his fingers over the yellowed keys. It had once been a good instrument and did not deserve the contemptuous name he had given it.

"Now, Carlotta, listen!" he began with a mischievous look in his eyes. "This is the first movement — see if you know what I am telling you."

Charlotte gave close attention to the march of chords that came from a distance and drew nearer. She enjoyed Max's improvisations, for this musical game had been played before.

"It's a gathering of some kind," she said, as the long, slim fingers ceased their rapid action. "It isn't a march on foot either; there are horses."

"Right-oh!" said Max. "It's the people driving to the picnic yesterday. Now, this?" plunging into a fantastic medley.

"That's the sports and the fun afterward. What's that one strain which keeps coming in?"

"That is the Anstice *motif*. This is the Epic of Nan!" replied Max, suddenly transferring the fingers of his right hand to the high treble keys.

Charlotte rose from her seat to lean over the piano, for in upon the bass notes of the amused and applauding spectators, came the squeal of the pursued pig. She listened intently while its vociferations alternated with the "Anstice *motif*" until the movement ended with the crash of the capture.

"Max, that's the cleverest thing I ever heard!" she exclaimed, laughing, but filled with admiration for the musician who could conceive the idea and execute it so skilfully. "I can't see how you ever did it! Couldn't you write it out?"

"It wouldn't amount to anything if I could; it would be funny only to those who knew what it was; and when you consider the matter, you couldn't make a really great piece of music out of a greased pig!" said Max gayly, his fingers gliding into a waltz that set Charlotte's feet twitching. "We must have another dance soon; we'll ask Auntie to come and play, for I want to practice that last jig step Nan taught me."

"Nan knows all the newest dances. Mamma thinks they are shockingly undignified, but they are stacks of fun."

"I shall teach them to Connie. She can dance several now, but it takes Nan to have the latest acquisitions. What did your mother say about that pig?"

"She didn't say anything!" Charlotte acknowledged. "I believe she felt unequal to the situation, and really, when you stop to think about it, what *could* she say?"

There was a light footfall on the piazza. Charlotte, standing with her back to the window, was unconscious of the inquisitive, radiant face that looked in. Max saw Anstice, grinned, and began to sing teasingly.

"There was a lady loved a pig.
'Honey!' said she.
'Lovely swine, will you be mine?'
'Humph!' said he!"

CHAPTER XXVI

THE "BACON BAT"

CHARLOTTE was desperately drowsy on the morning of the day appointed for Max's "bacon bat," but further sleep was impossible after excited Anstice had jumped out of bed at an early hour to cast anxious glances at the sky.

The sun was shining brightly and though the air was chilly enough to justify the suspicion of frost during the past night, the indications were for one of those perfect, still autumn days peculiar to early September.

"Nan, it won't make the slightest difference to the weather if you fall out that window, and it does matter to me! Do come back to bed. Any one would think you'd never been on a picnic before!"

"I never did go on one where there was to be a fire and bacon and eggs," replied Anstice, shivering in the sharp air and coming into bed again, where she tried to warm her cold feet against her patient and long-suffering sister.

Charlotte gave a shriek, instantly muffled at thought of her mother in the next room.

"Nan, you are enough to drive one crazy! For

pity's sake, keep your feet where they are; don't try another place!"

"I know this will be the most exciting day of my life," responded Anstice, cuddling down under the blankets. "Max says we will go across the lake to the beach at the foot of that side hill and build the fire. There are to be eggs by the dozen and stacks of bacon. Mrs. Tyler is making doughnuts! I smell them!"

"Nan, where *are* you going?" demanded Charlotte in dismay, for Anstice had again bounced out of bed and was getting into kimono and slippers.

"After a doughnut, of course! You needn't get up; I'll bring you one."

Charlotte subsided. She was too much accustomed to her sister's unexpected ways to be surprised, and when Anstice returned five minutes later, with two large, freshly sugared doughnuts on a saucer, Charlotte was quite ready to eat her share.

"I hoped for two apiece," said Anstice when the last crumb had vanished, "but Mrs. Tyler thought one was all either of us ought to eat at this hour in the morning. I don't see what that has to do with it. She said Mr. Tyler had already eaten three, but being a mere man, she supposed he'd probably live through it. Let's get up, Charlotte. We can begin to make the sandwiches!"

"We might as well," agreed Charlotte. "For some

reasons, Nan, I shall be glad to get home again where I have a room to myself."

"I've been very patient with you this summer," retorted Anstice. "I haven't said one word, no matter how many times you have straightened my bureau drawers or folded my hair-ribbons!"

"It's very good of you!" sighed Charlotte, who was luckily blessed with a sense of humor.

Anstice was not the only one excited over the prospect of a picnic. Sky, lake and mountain all seemed offering an invitation to house-dwellers to come out and enjoy the loveliness of the autumn world. A boating trip and an outdoor dinner appeared as a positive duty on so beautiful a day.

Hope was nearly as full of joyous anticipation as Anstice, and since Max, too, was extremely enthusiastic, they were sent ahead in the canoe, while the calmer members of the party followed more slowly in the boat. The canoe had taken its full share of the lunch, and was already a third of the distance across the lake before the boat left the pier, for Anstice and Max were in such high spirits that energetic paddling was the only rate of progress at all suited to their mood.

Mrs. Ralston and Molly sat in the stern to steer, and Charlotte perched in the bow, while June and Mr. Thornley took the oars. The lake was sunny and placid, and every moment of the way seemed so full

of beauty that neither oarsman felt any impulse to hurry after the canoe.

High on the slopes of Blueberry and Baldface, a few bright leaves were beginning to glimmer among the dark trees,— just a hint of the glorious raiment the frost would presently fling over all the hills.

Their destination was a spot on the opposite shore, where a small sandy beach lay at the foot of a clearing on the slope of a steep side hill. At this point, there was a little bayou with so narrow an entrance that it seemed almost a separate pond. The hills on either side made it look deep and dark, but when lighted by the sun, there was nothing forbidding or sombre in its aspect.

The canoe reached the place appointed long before the boat, and presently Mrs. Ralston, who alone was facing the bayou, saw the girls and Max moving about on the beach, evidently collecting wood for the fire.

"Max is getting everything ready to begin as soon as we come," she said, smiling. "How they are scurrying around!"

June cast a glance over his shoulder. "I don't care if they begin to cook, but I want to be in for my share of the results. I am so hungry now that I could eat 'most anything. Max has lighted his fire."

"They may start on the bacon, but we have the eggs with us," replied his mother.

June turned back, and the *Dart* kept on her leisurely

way. Across the lake flew a loon. Its unearthly scream seemed a direct challenge to the people in the boat.

"They ought to make him take out a license to yell like that!" commented June, mocking the bird so successfully that Molly's eyes grew round with wonder.

"June, that's a clever imitation," declared Mr. Thornley. "If you hadn't been so near, I should really have thought it another loon."

"Oh, look!" Mrs. Ralston exclaimed suddenly. "What has happened? Why, just see how much smoke is coming from Max's fire!"

Both Mr. Thornley and June stopped rowing to look around. Clouds of thickening smoke were rising from the hillside. After an instant, Mr. Thornley dipped his oars.

"Let's see what we can do in the way of speed, June. Max has evidently let his fire get away from him."

"Set the stroke and I'll keep up," replied June briefly.

Not for nothing had Mr. Thornley rowed on the Oxford varsity crew! The *Dart* began fairly to leap through the water.

"It never occurred to me to caution Max," said Mr. Thornley after a moment. "He has camped so often with his father and had so much experience along that line that I never thought of warning him."

"Will it do any great damage?" asked Mrs. Ralston anxiously.

"I should suppose the only danger is that it may get into the woods. If it does, the standing timber may suffer. We can probably prevent that."

"We haven't had rain for weeks, and everything is so dry!" sighed Mrs. Ralston.

"I can see the flames!" announced Charlotte from her seat in the bow. "It looks as if the whole hillside was burning!"

The *Dart* was near enough now so that an occasional figure could be distinguished amid the drifting smoke. Max and the girls were evidently doing their best to fight the fast spreading fire.

Upon the beach were a few scattered and smoking embers, and the circle of burned grass began at the bank above the sand and curved in a widening arc up the side hill. The hill itself was covered with short dried grass, matted pine needles, a few stunted evergreens and a great quantity of broken branches and twigs, all of the most inflammable nature. Scorched by the summer sun and dried by the wind, they were in the exact condition readily to catch fire. On either side of the clearing were the woods, and above it rose the heavily timbered slopes of Baldface.

Hope, with a cushion she had soaked in water, was wildly endeavoring to check the flames on one side. Anstice, with a paddle, was making equally violent ef-

forts to beat out the advancing line on the other, and Max was desperately trying with the second paddle to dig a trench in the comparatively sandy soil at the top of the cleared slope.

The boat grated on the beach and Mr. Thornley and June sprang hastily ashore.

"Molly and I will stay here," said Mrs. Ralston anxiously. "Charlotte, be very careful."

The fire was spreading rapidly in three directions. Max, only, was having the slightest success in checking it, and his efforts were far from producing any lasting results. Mr. Thornley hurried up the slope to Anstice.

"Let me take that paddle, Nan! Now, be careful! Tuck your braid of hair inside your blouse! Hope!" he shouted, "take care not to let your clothes catch fire!"

Paddle in hand, he sprang rapidly up the hill to help dig the ditch which alone might stop the fire in that direction. June seized a backboard and began to beat out the flames, while Charlotte soaked a second cushion.

Molly, with eyes big and excited, sat on her mother's lap, watching the scene. Mrs. Ralston looked on for some moments with increasing anxiety.

"It seems as if I *must* do something to help!" she said half aloud.

For the boys, she had little fear, but the skirts and

heavy hair of the girls made the proceeding far more dangerous for them.

Hope's cushion finally caught fire, and the insufficiently soaked hay went up quickly in a burst of flame. To Mrs. Ralston's great relief, she and Anstice presently came running down to the beach. Both were hot, smoky and breathless, with faces reddened by the flames.

"Mr. Thornley told us to take the boat and row over to that point near the Barrett farm and ask them for shovels and pails!" gasped Hope.

"He wouldn't let us stay," panted Anstice. "He said it wasn't safe with our skirts. See, he's sending Charlotte down, too!"

"I'll get out and let you two go alone," said Mrs. Ralston. "The beach is perfectly safe and you can go much more quickly without Molly and me."

Anstice and Hope pushed off at once and rowed away with commendable speed. Charlotte went hastily down to the lake and knelt for an instant at its very margin. To Mrs. Ralston's consternation, she was extinguishing the smouldering edge of her serge skirt.

"It was just the right length to catch," she said quietly, hearing Mrs. Ralston's gasp of horror. "The other girls have shorter ones. It's all right now. It was just burning slowly. Mr. Thornley says we mustn't come back for it isn't safe. He's just as calm

as if nothing at all was going on. He and Max have stopped it at the top, but they can't do anything yet at the sides."

"Oh, Charlotte!" exclaimed Mrs. Ralston, seeing that a full inch of hem was missing across the front of the blue skirt. "Oh, Charlotte!"

"It's out now," said Charlotte, smiling. "It wouldn't have blazed, and I felt it at once against my ankle."

To the watchers on the beach, it seemed as if the fire spread like a whirlwind. The day was not at all breezy, but the débris with which the hillside was strewn blazed so quickly that it was terrible to think what would have happened had there been more wind. Nothing could be seen or heard of Mr. Thornley and the boys. So intent were Mrs. Ralston and Charlotte upon watching the conflagration that they were unaware of the approach of a boat until it grounded on the beach beside them.

Mr. Tyler and Ben tumbled out. The boat contained spades, an axe, some old brooms, and three pails. Mr. Tyler, seizing an armful of tools, rushed up the hill without stopping to speak. Ben hurriedly filled a couple of pails with water and started after him.

"I can carry up that other pail!" Charlotte volunteered. "Oh, I will be careful, Mrs. Ralston! I'll only go where it is burned out."

Once on the scene of action, Charlotte stayed to fight fire, finding an old broom and a pail of water far better weapons than a pillow.

Mr. Tyler and Ben fell to work with shovels, throwing the earth from the ditch upon the advancing line of fire. Provided with proper tools, Mr. Thornley and the boys found their efforts of more avail. Even to Mrs. Ralston, who saw only a smoke-begrimed man or boy running down to fill a pail and toiling back without time for speech, it seemed as if the flames were spreading less rapidly. There was one moment of horror when the fire suddenly sprang up into a large tree with a cruel roar that sounded demoniacal. Yet there was a terrible beauty in the fierce advance of the flames, in their incredible speed, their flashing colors, their wild leaps and bounds, the way they sprang like living things from one point to another; in the clouds of smoke that rose slowly and drifted off across a background of perfectly blue sky and the dark mountain pines. Down on the beach the sun shone brightly, the waves lapped gently on the shore, and a tiny sandpiper with slender red legs ran along the water's edge.

Presently a second boat came quickly in with two men from the Barrett farm, also well provided with tools. Hope and Anstice, having executed their errand, rowed back more slowly, and Mrs. Ralston was glad when Charlotte soon returned to the beach.

"Mr. Thornley sent me down again," she explained.

"He says we may carry water for the men to use, but we must keep away from the flames."

Hope and Anstice joined in the water-carrying and were of great service in keeping the fire fighters supplied. For the most part, the men worked in silence and very coolly. The principal thing was to check the fire before it reached the edge of the clearing and there were seven to accomplish this, for Max and June were doing their full share. Little by little the line of flame was narrowed down. It was still raging vigorously at one point where there was a heap of dead wood and brittle branches, and on the opposite side a big tree blazed ominously. As the fire died out along the edges, the strength of the party could be concentrated on these two places. Presently, the lessening tongues of flame vanished, and only wreaths and jets of smoke going up from charred logs were left. Two isolated stumps were still burning merrily, and Charlotte took great satisfaction in pouring a pail of water upon each, and hearing it sizzle, at first vigorously, then less and less so, until the hissing died completely away with the subsiding smoke.

There was still danger that the smouldering dead wood might again burst into flame, so the party carried water and faithfully poured it upon smoking spots until there seemed no possible chance of further conflagration. Mr. Barrett and his son did not remain until this point was reached. As soon as the fire was

under control, they rowed away, for both had left pressing farm duties to hurry to the rescue.

The moment came when the last wreath of smoke died away and the hillside lay black and disfigured under the summer sky. The burned area extended from the lake bank to the top of the slope, to the woods on one side, and just into them on the other.

"Well!" said Mr. Tyler as he sat down on the prow of his boat and wiped his forehead with his handkerchief. "Now it's all over, I *should* like to hear how it began!"

"It was all my fault," said Max bravely. He was begrimed with charcoal and smoke, his face was burned, and yet, in spite of both tan and heat, he was curiously pale.

"How did it happen, Max?" asked Mr. Thornley. "You are such an experienced camper that I am sure it was an accident."

Max flashed him a grateful look, but replied honestly.

"It was an accident, St. George, but all the same it was due to my carelessness. The boat was so far behind the canoe and we were so hungry that I thought we would build the fire and have it all ready when you came. There weren't any stones on the beach to make a fireplace, so I thought I could take small logs. Of course I know that when there aren't stones, one should use green wood for the back and fore logs.

But the beach was so wide that I thought it would be safe to take two pieces of drift wood that were just the right shape. I did dip them in the lake, but it wasn't as though they'd been thoroughly soaked. I lighted the fire and they blazed up at once. I saw it was a bigger fire than I could manage, so I began to put it out with sand. But just then, there was a gust of wind toward the hill and a spark went over. Nan saw it almost at once and screamed, but though it seemed as if all three of us got there in a second, it was too late. We couldn't stop it."

Max had told the story in a frank, straightforward manner, and at its conclusion, he turned to Mr. Tyler.

"Who owns it?" he asked, indicating the burned hillside. "I want to settle for any damages; my father would wish me to."

"It belongs to me," was Mr. Tyler's unexpected answer.

"Oh, does it?" said Max rather blankly. "Then you'll let me pay whatever it's worth, won't you?"

"It isn't worth anything, Max," Mr. Tyler went on kindly. "Nothing burned that was of any value. There wasn't much there but dead branches and a young pine or two. If it had got into the woods, it would be a different story. The woods are dry, and there's no telling where we could have stopped it, if it had once started up Baldface. I should have hated to see my timber go. That's why I came in such a

hurry when I saw the smoke. I didn't care anything about the clearing. As far as that's concerned, it's a good riddance to a lot of rubbish and I guess there'll be a record crop of blueberries there next year."

Mr. Tyler rose as if he considered the matter settled, but Max seized his arm.

"I was awfully careless, Mr. Tyler, for I knew better. I don't deserve to have you take it this way!"

"Well, now, Max," said Mr. Tyler almost affectionately, "it repays me as much as anything needs to be repaid, just to know you did it! You see," he went on, enjoying the puzzled expression on Max's face, "I've sometimes thought you had 'most too much good sense for a boy of your age! It sort of worried me. I declare! it's a real relief to me to know you can be as careless as the next chap!"

Mr. Tyler shoved the boat off as he ended, and was several strokes from shore before Max recovered from his surprise.

"Max, that's one on you!" grinned June. "But, I say! The next time you want to start a little diversion in the shape of a conflagration, kindly do it on level land. This fighting a forest fire on a steep slope is no cinch!"

"You people must be almost starved," interposed Mrs. Ralston, who saw that Max was still too troubled to respond to any joking. "It's nearly three o'clock! The girls and Molly and I had some sand-

wiches. Wash your hands in the lake and come and eat something. Here is a towel and a cake of soap. I knew Molly would get her hands dirty so I came provided."

"'Bacon and eggs and a bar of soap!'" quoted Mr. Thornley as he leaned over the side of the boat. "I could almost eat all three!"

"Some of the eggs are broken," said Hope. "I knocked over the basket in my hurry to get a cushion."

"We'll scramble them!" replied Mr. Thornley. "June, let's row across the cove and get a few of those stones. Then we can make our fireplace and cook our belated picnic in no time."

Max felt in anything but a picnic mood, but he made an attempt to put aside his depression, and went quietly off to collect the necessary fuel. When the stones arrived a heap of wood was ready on the beach.

Mrs. Ralston made the coffee and Mr. Thornley and Charlotte cooked the bacon and eggs. The fun they had doing it raised the spirits of the whole party and by the time the delayed meal was over, Max had reached the point where a smile was no longer a distinct effort, and everybody was feeling better.

Charlotte had been concealing her scorched skirt, but all the weary fire-fighters bore unmistakable evidence of what they had been doing. Hands and faces had been washed, but smoke, ashes, and charcoal had worked havoc with sweaters and blouses.

"I was just thinking," said Hope, looking at her ruined shoes, "that it is lucky these clothes aren't expected to last longer than this vacation!"

Her brother chuckled. "I don't believe Mr. Thornley ever had on such a dirty collar before!"

"I know it is all smeared with charcoal," agreed that gentleman. "Fortunately it is not my only one."

Molly suddenly waved a small hand toward the blackened hillside. "Max made a nawful big fire to cook a negg!" she remarked confidentially.

Molly's contributions to the family conversation were usually appreciated, but the success of this speech surprised her. Tired and somewhat unnerved by their recent experience, the entire party burst into such mirth that it was several seconds before any one was able to speak.

"Molly!" gasped Mr. Thornley at last. "With your customary lucidity, you have stated the case in a nutshell!"

"You mean an eggshell!" interposed the incorrigible June, while Max seized the still astonished Molly and hugged her vigorously.

"O dear!" sighed Charlotte as the laughter finally subsided. "How my side does ache! This very morning Nan woke me up and said she knew it was going to be the most exciting day of her life!"

"Well, it has been!" declared Anstice. "This is certainly the most strenuous picnic I ever attended!"

CHAPTER XXVII

A MESSAGE FROM MRS. LEMOINE

THE boys did not permit Mr. Thornley to forget his suggestion for another night on the mountain. The plan was duly carried out with the substitution of Baldface for Blueberry.

The girls wished to go for the climb and the fun of a picnic on the top. Since the way down by the north side was perfectly plain and open, they were allowed to join the party. How much had happened since their first ascent of the mountain and how well they had grown to know one another!

"Max," said Charlotte after the merry supper on the ledges as she was waiting for Hope and Anstice to start, "don't you think it is very odd that we have not heard from Mrs. Lemoine?"

"Yes, I do," replied Max reflectively. "Of course, she might not answer directly, and there is the possibility of her letter going astray, though I enclosed an addressed envelope with an English stamp so there is little chance of that. It ought to be here. Why, Carlotta, I simply *must* get that affair straightened out before I leave. I wish her letter would come, so I

could write again to Mr. Ames! You're going for the mail when you get down, aren't you? If there is a letter for me directed in my own writing, it will be the right one, so just keep it for me."

Anstice and Hope would not leave until Mr. Thornley had recited for them the "Ballad of East and West," which they had fallen into the habit of demanding from him on every possible occasion, but at its conclusion, they announced themselves as ready and the girls began their descent. For a long distance they could be seen from the summit, but presently the slope of the mountain hid them from sight and when they came out on the level ground, it was too dark for them to be distinguished.

The night was cooler than the one on Blueberry, but afforded a glorious sunset, followed by the beauty of the stars, and the harvest moon, rising over a view that included less of sea but more of lake and mountain than from the top of Blueberry.

It was so beautiful and so peaceful that a long silence fell over the three, broken at last by Max.

"St. George, what are you thinking? Do think in words! I suppose there must be some adequate to it all, but I don't know them."

Mr. Thornley smiled. "Oh, yes, you do, Max, if you mean those I was thinking."

June looked up with interest. He often snubbed his cousin for being what he termed "poetical," but

he himself was responsive to beauty of any kind, though never demonstrative concerning it. He did not recognize the words that Mr. Thornley spoke softly in a musical chant, but Max's face lighted at once.

"O ye Mountains and Hills, bless ye the Lord: praise him and magnify him forever."

"I feel better!" sighed Max. "I knew there must be something that belonged to it. It is the one thing adequate," he added, lying down to look at the stars, for the sunset radiance had faded. "I shall never hear it in church again without thinking of Baldface as well as other mountains I've seen. Look, St. George,— what is that constellation here in the west?"

The others also lay flat and spent an hour with the stars until their brilliance was dimmed by the moonlight. The night was quiet and wholly undisturbed until dawn, when a white-headed eagle awakened them by the sound of his wings. He perched in a tree not fifty feet away, but it was not long before he discovered the invasion of his mountain top, and with a swoop, soared off over the valley, hardly seeming to move his pinions as he floated serenely high in the air.

They had brought no breakfast, intending to go down early, so after seeing the sunrise, they started in the beautiful morning freshness and arrived at the house in time to take a swim before the family was astir.

Charlotte gave Max a significant glance as the congregation came out after the church service, and presently found an opportunity to tell him that the long-expected letter had arrived. There was no chance to read it then, and no prospect of any, for they could not slip away from the others on the way home, and dinner would be ready immediately.

"You read it and tell me when you have an opportunity," said Charlotte.

"No, I won't, Carlotta. We must read it together, somehow. I tell you what we will do. As soon as we can get away after dinner, either one of us, let's go to our place in the little pines. If I get there first, I'll wait for you or you can wait for me."

Charlotte agreed and was first to reach the rendezvous. The still afternoon sunlight fell softly through the fragrant pines. Near by, a cricket chirped and its cheerful reiteration brought a smile to Charlotte's lips. Soon after his arrival, Max had serenely stated a belief that crickets could bite. The unfailing gravity with which he defended this absurd theory in the face of much ridicule left June and Charlotte still uncertain as to whether or not he really believed it. To their clinching argument that crickets never did bite, he would calmly reply that it was no proof they couldn't!

When Max finally arrived, it was in haste. "Did

you think I was never coming?" he exclaimed. "I thought June would never let me go! Where is it?"

Charlotte held out the letter as he flung himself beside her. Max broke the seal of the envelope and unfolded the single sheet it contained.

"Oh, it's written in French!" she remarked as she eagerly grasped it by one edge.

"I'll translate," said Max, but he did not speak as his eye hastily skimmed the contents. As he turned the page his cheeks flushed and when he finished the brief epistle, he looked up with a disconcerted face.

"Max, do read it to me!" begged Charlotte, who had waited with outward calm but inward impatience.

Her companion looked again at the letter. His expression was a comical mixture of surprise and mortification, and he muttered something in a language which Charlotte did not understand.

"This is a fix!" he added in English. "Listen, Carlotta!"

"MONSIEUR MAXFIELD HAMILTON:

"*Honored Sir:*

"There has arrived at the convent of the holy nuns a letter which has caused to my mother much distress of soul. It was not possible for me to bring it at once to her, but when the occasion served, this was done.

"Honored Sir, her sainted husband has been at rest, (God have mercy on his soul!) since before I, the little Angélique, saw the light. Nine and twenty years ago, he was laid in the sacred soil beneath the shadow of

St. Roche, and my mother took ship from Canada forever. No woman had ever so gracious a husband, and he was, as well, *dévot*. Never could he have lived as does this man of whom you write. It is an insult to the departed and to my mother that one should think so sainted a man as her François could be such as your hermit — your man apart! I do not understand why you should seek so to dishonor us, or to cast evil on the fair name of our dead.

"I remain, Monsieur Hamilton,
"Your servant,
"SŒUR ANGÉLIQUE."

"Gracious!" exclaimed Charlotte. "Max, how awful!"

"It is rather bad," commented her companion with a rueful glance at the letter. "Hang it all! I have got into a giddy mess!"

"I never thought she could take it so!"

"There's no reason why she should," grumbled Max. "It just happened to strike her that way. I'd be willing to bet that her sainted François was a whiskey-drinking old French-Canadian trapper, and that it's lucky for her he is in Paradise! I'm sure I don't want to meet him there!'

Max rumpled his hair in ludicrous perplexity. It was far from smooth before he touched it, and between the wind and his troubled fingers, it bristled in every direction.

"Carlotta, I was considerable of an idiot to have said so much to Mr. Lemon. You were right about

that! Here I've managed to get him all excited, because I was so sure that Mrs. Lemoine and Angélique were Kitty and the baby! What *will* he say when he finds out they are not?"

"It does seem rather dreadful from his point of view," replied Charlotte soberly. "I suppose it would hardly answer to say nothing further to him?"

"I'm afraid not. Confound it! I said too much; that's all the trouble. If only I'd held my tongue and never told him that I'd written! Dad *says* I talk too much and this time I certainly have done so!"

"You might write him a note," suggested Charlotte.

"It's improbable that he ever goes to the postoffice, and I doubt if he can read. Besides, Carlotta, to get out of it that way seems a bit cowardly. On the whole, seeing I've got into this fix, I fancy I'd better take what's coming to me."

"It would be nicer to tell him, only Mr. Lemon is rather crazy. He can't be quite sane, you know, Max. I am afraid he may be so disappointed that he will be angry and do something violent."

"No fear of that. He is an old man, and I am too quick for him. Well, Carlotta, seeing we leave so soon, this afternoon may be the best chance and the only thing to do is to take my medicine at once."

"I shall go, too, and wait for you, but this time I am going up the path till I can see the cottage, so I shall know if you are in any danger."

Max scorned this possibility, but Charlotte insisted. Once again, they made their way through the sea of fragrant little pines and the sheep pasture to the highway. They came out below the base of Baldface, and as they took the uphill mountain road, saw far in the other direction, a single sauntering figure.

"That's St. George," said Max. "We'll walk back with him."

"I wish I could go all the way with you," Charlotte remarked as she reluctantly stopped at the edge of the clearing. "I feel as if it was just as much my fault."

Max gave her an odd glance. "I'm always getting into scrapes, Carlotta. It's not your fault in the least; I'm invariably doing things I'd better have left undone — more's the pity! It seems to me I'm always having to apologize for something! Well, here goes!"

Charlotte waited, concealed in the thick evergreens while Max approached the cottage. Mr. Lemon was in sight, pottering in his forlorn garden, but looked up suspiciously as his visitor drew near. To Charlotte's surprise, the interview was rather long. Max seemed to be experiencing difficulty in making himself understood, but suddenly Mr. Lemon's voice rose in a wild shriek. The words were perfectly unintelligible to the terrified Charlotte, but the tone was hoarse with anger. Max stood his ground and still tried to explain, in spite of the flood of ejaculations that was

being poured upon him, but finally Mr. Lemon seized a hoe and started threateningly toward his visitor.

Charlotte gave a gasp of horror but the half-insane old man never came within striking distance of the agile lad, nor did he pursue more than a few yards.

"What did he say?" she asked, when the two had regained the safety of the road.

"Nothing fit to repeat!" panted Max. "He was chiefly swearing at me. Whew! I never heard such blue language in all my life! Carlotta, when I went before, I evidently didn't make him understand in the least about the letter or what I was trying to do. Of course he is half mad anyway, if not three-quarters, and it is no wonder he didn't take it in. To-day, he understood and was simply raging. It is certain that if they had been the right people, he would have nothing to do with them."

Max wiped the perspiration from his forehead as he concluded.

"He is a past-master in the art of swearing. If that is the way he talked to Kitty, I don't wonder she left him!"

Charlotte looked sympathetic. "Max, I think it is a shame when you tried so hard to straighten it. It seemed as if it *must* come out all right."

"There appears to have been something wrong, but I don't see how I could have helped it. There's St. George! We'll overtake him in a minute."

Mr. Thornley turned in response to the whistle, and waited for them. As they came up, he saw immediately that something unusual had happened.

"What's up?" he inquired, looking with an amused glance from Charlotte's distressed face to Max's flushed one.

"We had a little plan that began the first of the summer and that we thought was coming out so nicely, and it hasn't," replied Charlotte. "Shall we tell him, Max?"

"Yes," said Max, "let's tell him. Come and sit here on the wall, St. George, and listen to our tale of woe."

Mr. Thornley smiled, and seated himself on the stone wall, while the young people, one on either side of him, related in detail their excited story. He listened without comment until they finished, and then, drawing his pipe from his pocket, proceeded to fill and light it.

"Max," he remarked calmly, "you are an engaging young sinner, but it strikes me that you merit a caning for interfering in an affair that didn't in the least concern you."

At this wholly unexpected comment, Charlotte's eyes and mouth both opened.

"I meant it for the best!" protested Max. "I was so sure that Mrs. Lemoine and Sister Angélique must be Kitty and the baby. I thought it was really worth

while to try to arrange things when they had gone wrong for thirty years!"

Max looked much mortified and disconcerted as he leaned against the wall with hands in his pockets, trying with one foot to dislodge a loose stone.

"According to your story, the attempt was made years ago by the priest and again by the philanthropist. It is only in books that young people succeed in settling a feud where their elders fail. It isn't frequent in real life. You and Charlotte would better have asked advice. It was possible to ascertain if your Mrs. Lemoine was the right one without her knowing that the inquiry was made. In that case, the matter could have been dropped without injury to her feelings and without exciting the indignation of Mr. Lemon. I know your intention was of the best, but it wasn't very wise, and it was very youthful!"

Mr. Thornley smiled at Charlotte as he concluded. His tone was so kindly that the words could leave no sting. They both looked at Max whose face was flushed and crest-fallen, with gaze bent on the stone he had now loosened and was turning idly with his foot.

"I never thought of it in that way before," remarked Charlotte reflectively after a pause which the September sunshine seemed to fill with golden silence.

"No more did I," said Max frankly. "I thought, if I thought at all, that it was rather virtuous to be

playing Providence like a little tin god on wheels. Honestly, it never occurred to me that I wasn't minding my own business!"

"Now, Max," said Mr. Thornley, "look me straight in the face and acknowledge that you weren't!"

He spoke in so coaxing and whimsical a manner that Charlotte laughed outright, and the cloud on Max's face broke and disappeared before the smile he could not suppress.

"It seems extremely natural to have St. George sitting on me again! Well, then — sorry!"

"Good boy! Now, I want to offer you two a bit of advice. The next time you set out to put the world to rights — mind, I'm not saying it isn't a commendable ambition — please think until your hair is white before you again interfere between a supposed husband and wife, no matter what the circumstances. Taming lions and tigers is safer work and you're more likely to be thanked for doing it."

Max had picked up the good-sized stone he had loosened, and as Mr. Thornley concluded, he threw it across the road. It crashed through the foliage of a tree and its descent was followed by that of a large hornet's nest. The angry insects flew out in a cloud as it came to earth.

"'Discretion appears to be the better part of valor!'" commented Mr. Thornley as he hastily slid

from the wall. "Let's stay not on the order of our going, but go at once!"

An ominous hum filled the air as the three pelted down the hill. Mr. Thornley kept pace on the slope but Charlotte and Max both distanced him on the level.

"Wasn't one hornet's nest enough to bring about your ears?" he inquired as he came up with them.

"If I had aimed at it, I should probably have missed!" laughed Max. "I never saw it until it came down."

"I knew it was there," said Charlotte. "I watched the hornets flying while we were talking."

"St. George," began Max as they sauntered down the shady road at a more moderate pace. "It's rather late in the day to ask advice, but I'm quite ready to take it if you'll tell me what to do now."

Max's tone was such a queer combination of amusement and penitence that Charlotte laughed.

"On the whole, I think you've done enough," replied Mr. Thornley calmly, but his eyes twinkled as he spoke. "You would certainly better leave Mr. Lemon to himself; as for Madame — are you willing I should see that letter?"

Max produced it, and looking over Mr. Thornley's shoulder, also re-read it.

"I would write a brief note, saying it was a mistake and apologizing for troubling her. What about

this deed you mentioned? Have you been moving heaven and earth to find that, too?"

"No, I haven't!" Max declared, laughing at the accusation. "I only wrote to Dad's lawyer, and as I told you, he thinks the story of the land is true."

"I don't!" said Mr. Thornley. "If it is, there is no way of proving it without the deed, and to find that seems impossible."

"The 'thing that couldn't' does happen sometimes!" Max persisted rather wilfully.

Mr. Thornley shook his head. "Just mind your own business, old chap!" he said cheerfully. "It strikes me you've developed a penchant for writing letters nearly as bad as Ronald's attack a few years ago. Between his vivid imagination and a facile pen, dire disaster resulted, as you doubtless remember."

Max smiled at the recollection. "I have made rather an average mess out of it," he admitted.

"What has happened to my pupil?" inquired Mr. Thornley of the landscape in general. "Seldom have I seen Maxfield so meek!"

"It's doubtless due to Maine air. I assure you it won't last in Rome!" retorted Max. "Oh, I do so hate to go! I've had such a jolly summer!"

Max stopped abruptly, stood for half a moment in deep thought, and then laughed. Across his mind had flashed the memory of a June day in London and a certain conversation that had taken place in the Hotel

Russell. Realizing that neither Charlotte nor St. George understood his amusement, he explained its cause.

"Dad should have heard me saying that I didn't want to leave!" he ended. "He was right, after all."

"Nan and I didn't want to come here, either," said Charlotte. "We were quite unhappy because we couldn't go to the seashore where we have had lovely times other summers. But it was necessary for Mamma to be in a quieter place, so we were ashamed to make a fuss. Just the other night we agreed that we had never had a nicer vacation."

"It's a shame it has to end!" sighed Max. "I only wish I hadn't been such a dippy baboon over this Lemon affair!"

"Oh, cheer up!" interposed Mr. Thornley placidly. "The fellow who never gets into a mess is the chap who never does anything worth doing. That's merely one incident out of a whole happy summer!"

"I hate to leave!" Max repeated. "It's lucky you are here, St. George, or I might not have the courage to tear myself away."

"Who knows how soon we shall all meet again?" inquired Mr. Thornley, smiling at Charlotte. "And I'm anticipating a pleasant trip through Italy."

"Why didn't you tell me about it when you wrote?" Max demanded.

"I wanted to see for how much knocking about you

were fit, before proposing any plans. I have an interesting route to discuss on the steamer."

Max's face brightened. He knew that Mr. Thornley was a delightful traveling companion and was secretly much pleased that he had been chosen to share those plans. "I'm so glad you wanted me!" he said boyishly. "It might just as well have been some one else."

"So it might!" agreed Mr. Thornley mischievously. "Only it wasn't! What a fortunate coincidence!"

"Everybody is going over on the buckboard with us to see us off," Max went on. "We'll start for town early enough so we can have ices at the chemist's. I sha'n't have many more American sundaes and when I get to New York, I'm going to buy about thirty pounds of Huyler's to take with me!"

"Shall you let him?" inquired the shocked Charlotte of Mr. Thornley, who had heard this astonishing announcement with perfect tranquillity.

"If he chooses to be dying seasick, it's his own affair," answered Mr. Thornley unconcernedly. "He won't get any sympathy from me."

"Say twenty then!" amended Max.

"I'd split the twenty and send half of that to Charlotte. She ought to be consoled for this Lemoine fiasco."

"Oh, I will! That's a dandy idea! Carlotta, you shall have it and it sha'n't be lemon candy either!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE LAST OF MR. LEMON

MR. THORNLEY, having broken his eyeglasses, had retired to a darkened room. The three girls were gone to town with Mr. Tyler to get the lenses replaced, a pleasant task on so bright an afternoon. Convinced that St. George really preferred to be alone with his headache, Max went with June in the canoe.

Some time had elapsed since the cousins had been off by themselves and presently Max's thoughts returned to Mr. Lemon. In the matter of the deed, he and Charlotte had arrived at an impasse; perhaps June might have some helpful suggestion to make. So Max related the whole affair, with the exception of the unlucky letter to Mrs. Lemoine and its complete failure. That incident rankled a little in his memory, and it was so completely detached from the rest of the story that Max spared himself the mortification of confessing it.

June was extremely interested in the tale and just a trifle resentful that he had not been told before.

But he was naturally too sunny to bear any grudge and presently was discussing most earnestly the pros and cons of the problem. He saw no solution that did not involve finding the deed, and like Charlotte, scouted the probability that Kitty had taken it with her.

"Mr. Lemon has stowed it away somewhere," he declared. "I say, Max, I want a look at that place and at the tombstone. Can't we tie the canoe and cut up through the woods?"

Beaching the canoe in a little bayou, the boys started on a rough, uphill climb. There was no path and the underbrush grew densely, but in time they struck the high road not far below the path leading to Mr. Lemon's place. On reaching the edge of the clearing, they paused to reconnoitre.

"I fancy we'd better step softly," said Max. "The old man chased me out with a hoe the last time I came. But probably he's forgotten by now. There's the stone against the front door."

June stared at it curiously. The sunlight struck the other side of the cottage, leaving in shadow its unpainted front and the gray slab on the step.

"Max!" came a sudden exclamation. "I'll bet you a cooky that deed is under the stone!"

Max started so violently that he actually fell off the wall. Before he could speak, June went on.

"If the man is crazy, that's exactly where he'd put

it, and that's what he meant by saying his wife had it!"

"A great head has little June!" Max declared approvingly. "I wouldn't have thought that out in a year. Of course it's there! How shall we get it?"

"Anything to prevent our just walking up and looking?" inquired his cousin.

"Well, rather!" drawled Max. "Just remember you're dealing with a man who keeps a pet tombstone on his front doorstep. Diplomacy is called for. Let us be diplomatic."

"It's up to you, then!" June retorted with a grunt of combined disapproval and amusement. "Well?" he inquired after a pause, during which his cousin seemed wrapped in thought.

"I fancy I'm the sacrifice!" said Max, coming out of his reverie. "I may be, in truth, if the old chap hasn't forgotten my last visit! June, I'll go around the house and see if he's outside and if he'll talk to me. It's an even chance whether he'll run me off the place or whether he'll sit down and spiel about Canada. You can hear a whistle down here. Just sit tight where you are. If you hear a bar or two of 'Annie Laurie,' sneak up to the front door and have a look. It'll mean he's talking with me all right."

"Max, I'll recommend you for our next foreign ambassador," June commented, watching his cousin slide from the wall and emerge into the clearing. As

he approached the house, the old man appeared beyond it.

"*Bon jour, Monsieur Lemoine!*" Max called cheerfully. "*Il fait beau, n'est-ce-pas? Comment vous portez-vous?*"

June looked through the sheltering bushes with breathless interest. For a moment Mr. Lemon's attitude seemed relentlessly stiff and uncompromising. Max advanced, continuing to talk voluble French, and presently the old man seemed to relax in vigilance, and evidently made a reply. The next moment the two turned. With apparent amiability they disappeared behind the house.

Not waiting for the promised signal, June sprang from his seat, hurrying noiselessly but rapidly across the clearing toward the front door. The long grass was yellowed and ripened by the sun; in fact, asters and goldenrod were fast crowding it from the impoverished soil, but June might have walked on either sand or air for all he noticed. In three minutes he was at the door. Before investigating, he paused for a second. He could distinctly hear Max's pleasant voice, and gruff guttural tones that must belong to Mr. Lemon. There came a soft bar of music broken into a laugh.

Reassured, June peeped behind the tombstone. It did not actually touch the front door, as from a distance it appeared to do, but stood upright on a little

base. Nothing whatever was on the sill behind and the step itself was only a big stone slab. Any concealed document must be under the base.

Very cautiously June rested his hands on the monument to tilt it backward. The heavy stone obliged him to exert considerable force. Suddenly it yielded unexpectedly and to his utter consternation struck the door behind with a thud that must have been audible half up Baldface!

June gave an agonized glance under the base, jerked the stone back to its proper place with an energy that left it rocking, and fled for his life, expecting immediate pursuit. He dove for the nearest cover, fortunately at the end of the house, and eventually made a detour to the place where Max had left him. From this point of vantage he looked eagerly at the cottage. All appeared as before, except that both Max and Mr. Lemon were now visible, standing before the front door. Presently June saw his cousin turn away and come slowly across the grass, with no word of leave-taking to his companion, who did not seem to notice his departure. To June's surprise, Max looked flushed and disturbed.

"Did you tip it into the door?" he inquired as he joined June in the safe shelter of the woods.

"I nearly knocked the blamed door in! It scared me out of a year's growth. Did he know what the row was?"

"Not at first. He thought something fell in the house and went to look. Then an idea seemed to strike him and he rushed around the corner. You were out of sight so he never suspected. But the stone was moved just a little and the door was so weather-beaten that it was dented in where the top struck. June," Max went on, looking decidedly ashamed, "the poor old chap thought Kitty did it, that it was a warning or a message from her! I left because he was praying and it didn't seem right to listen."

June, in his turn, looked abashed, though he had far less reason than Max for feeling repentant.

"Let's not bother him any more," he said gruffly after a moment. "There wasn't anything under the stone."

"I'm glad there wasn't!" said his cousin unexpectedly. "I feel sufficiently like a condemned criminal already. But he told me some more about that cave on the mountain. His directions were so clear this time that I think we can find it. Let's have a try."

June agreed, glad to shake off the recollection of their late exploit. To him as well as to Max, it seemed as though they had been rather too near doing something questionable. Giving the clearing and the cottage a wide berth, they plunged into the timber on Baldface.

"We will keep around to the left until we find a big boulder poised on some rocks," said Max, translating from the directions he was mentally rehearsing in French.

Nearly half an hour passed before the boulder was located, a huge mass that must have weighed several tons.

"Now, from here we go straight up the mountain for about a quarter of a mile until we come to a cliff," Max directed.

The quarter-mile seemed long to both boys for it was very steep, but at last they reached a cliff rising fifty feet or more above their heads. About a third of the way up its face a ledge appeared, not wide, but apparently offering foothold.

"Mr. Lemon says the cave opens from that ledge. There should be an *aiguille* — a pointed rock, before its entrance."

"There's the rock!" June exclaimed, indicating a slender pinnacle twenty feet farther on.

The boys soon clambered up to a wider part of the ledge and found themselves facing a dark hole, opening undoubtedly into a cavity of some kind. June produced his pocket flashlight, but unluckily, its battery was nearly exhausted. The feeble flashes sufficed only to light the entrance for the boys to step in and see that the cave was fairly large, dry, and apparently quite unoccupied, even by bats, which might

reasonably be expected. Neither had matches so all exploration must be postponed. Vanishing sunlight, too, warned them to retrace their rough path to the lake and find the canoe before darkness fell completely.

As it was, they were very late for tea, reaching the Tyler gate just as the girls came out.

"We've eaten everything!" Anstice announced calmly. "Boys who are late get only bread and milk."

"Mrs. Tyler is a friend of mine!" June retorted. "She's killing a fatted calf for us now. Don't you wish you knew where we have been and what we've found?"

June's question had the expected effect. The three girls returned at once to the dining-room and constituted themselves volunteer waitresses, pressing upon the boys everything the table offered, and even persuading Sally to relent and cook the waffles she had declared the truants should go without. With prudent forethought, the desired information was withheld until neither could eat any more.

"You've done very well!" June announced to the girls when their attentions were no longer needed. "It's a cave, and we'll take you there to-morrow!"

His announcement was received with flattering interest. "Let's go to-night!" proposed Anstice, after the first exclamations and questions had subsided. "We can carry lanterns and it will be most exciting!"

"Mother won't let us," said the calmer Charlotte. "And besides, we want St. George, too, and his headache has used him all up."

"You haven't heard how we came to find it," June went on. "Max, it's your turn."

Max related a discreetly edited version of his acquaintance with Mr. Lemon. It contained no reference to Mrs. Lemoine nor to their afternoon experiment with the tombstone. That exploit lent no added glory to the tale. The sooner it was consigned to oblivion the better. Hope and Anstice derived several distinct thrills from Max's story, and neither noticed that Charlotte seemed less impressed.

"A man who won't speak to a woman! Will he even look at one? Max, I want to see him!" gasped Anstice.

"I want to see the house!" exclaimed Hope. "I'd be afraid of the man, but I'd like to see that tombstone."

"You can see the stone from the edge of the clearing," said Max. "We'll show it to you, but you really must keep perfectly still and not let him know you are there. He's daffy, you know, and it would annoy him."

"We'll be as still as mice," promised Anstice.

Soon after breakfast next morning, the party started. At Mr. Thornley's suggestion, June took a lantern so as not to be wholly dependent upon flash-

light batteries, even though new and supposedly reliable. Following the familiar uphill mountain road, they soon reached Mr. Lemon's place, where Mr. Thornley and the girls were piloted for a furtive peep at the old cottage. Hope and Anstice were impressed by the earnestness with which Max insisted upon perfect silence, and his evident anxiety not to have Mr. Lemon know of their presence. Even their high spirits were slightly dashed by the sense of brooding melancholy produced by that granite tombstone in its unusual setting. Their faces were decidedly serious as they rejoined June and Charlotte, who had waited in the road. Mr. Thornley seemed interested, though he made no comment, unless a quizzical smile directed at Max was meant to convey some subtle opinion.

This time both boys were certain of landmarks and led the way without faltering, even avoiding some of the rougher ground by slight detours. All the girls were good trampers and did not need assistance nor a special pace set for them. Before long June pointed out the ledge on the face of the cliff. They scrambled up the clefts to the uneven foothold and walked gingerly along to the wider space before the cave.

Its narrow entrance was almost concealed by the detached stone standing in front of it like a sentinel. The lantern revealed an interior perhaps twenty feet long and about eight feet high in the centre. Leaves

and branches had drifted in but the place was singularly dry.

The girls came in cautiously, expecting to see bones or other traces of animal occupancy, but all large beasts of prey had long since vanished from Baldface and there was nothing to indicate that the cave had ever served as a home for either man or animal. The only thing at all remarkable was a pile of branches in the farther end.

"From its looks, this cave was worn by water," commented Mr. Thornley. "I fancy that ages ago, a river flowed through here. You see that these broken rocks barring the entrance are of a different kind of stone. That water came from somewhere. Perhaps there is an entrance or connection with another cave."

The boys began to pull away the branches, revealing a hole, low down and securely closed by a fallen rock. The wanderings of that prehistoric river were not to be divulged. June caught his foot in a crooked limb as he turned away, and sat down with sudden violence. He picked himself up, looking much surprised.

"What on earth did I come down on so hard?" he inquired, kicking aside the heap of dead leaves on which he had fallen. "Well, look here!"

The light of the lantern divulged a small metal trunk about two feet long, with a curved top. It was

scarcely larger than a big despatch box. The metal had become discolored by time and the hinges were rusted apart or had been broken by June's fall.

"Let's take it outside," he suggested. "We can see so much better."

As he spoke, June picked the little chest up bodily and conveyed it to the outer air. In the bright September sunlight it looked dingy and battered, though except for the hinges, in good condition. The lock still held, but the loosened back permitted the lid to be raised. At first sight, the box appeared full of yellowed, discolored bits of cloth, once white. June lifted the uppermost.

"Why, it's a baby's dress!" Charlotte exclaimed in utter astonishment.

June dropped the small garment, too amazed for any words. "Well! did I ever!" he finally ejaculated.

Charlotte reached over his shoulder and picked up in succession three or four more carefully folded small garments, a very tiny pair of red leather anklets and a tin rattle. At the bottom was placed an old plaid shawl. Upon it lay a cheap, colored print of the Virgin Mother.

The gay party seemed struck speechless. Yielded ever a treasure chest contents so strange?

"Well!" said June at last. "Of all the queer things! Where *did* they come from?"

"No baby wears clothes like those now," Hope remarked. "See, the little dresses are low-necked and short-sleeved. They must be quite old. I never saw any like them."

"They're made like a dress Mother wore when she was a baby," Anstice added.

"Max!" Charlotte almost screamed. "This is Mr. Lemon's cave! Those things belong to Kitty and the baby!"

"Right you are, Charlotte!" June exclaimed, while Max, without a word, seized the trunk and turned it upside down.

"Oh, there must be some papers somewhere!" he gasped in excitement. "Of course they belong to them! He put them here when Kitty went away. Look again in the clothes! That deed *must* be here!"

The girls began to shake vigorously the scattered garments. From the folded shawl fell at once a small packet of papers. Max absolutely snatched them from Anstice's hands.

"Here we are!" he exclaimed, with fingers that trembled as they struggled with the rawhide strip that bound the documents. "Three of them! One must be the deed!"

He opened the first paper hastily. June seized another and Charlotte the third. One glance showed it to be in French and she turned quickly to Mr. Thornley.

"Here we are! Three of them! One must be the deed!"
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"Oh, look! It has a red seal and signatures!"

No less interested than the excited young people, Mr. Thornley took the folded paper, while Charlotte looked eagerly from him to Max, whose expression changed from interest to perplexity and then to disappointment.

"This is a letter written in English," said June, over whose shoulders both Hope and Anstice were leaning. "It is from James Marshall to Pierre Lemoine and just appoints a date when he wants to be met at Chicoutimi."

Max threw his document into the little chest and turned to scrutinize eagerly the one Mr. Thornley held. A glance sufficed.

"Oh, this is too much!" he exclaimed in disgust a moment later. Anstice had picked up the discarded paper and was examining it curiously.

"What is it?" she asked, unable to make head or tail of its unfamiliar French, but deciphering the names of Pierre Lemoine and Catherine Thibault.

"Only their marriage certificate!" Max replied rather sulkily, for his disappointment was keen.

Mr. Thornley folded the paper he still held and took off his eyeglasses with great deliberation. His face wore a smile that was at once half-sympathetic and half-amused.

"And this," he remarked to the expectant girls, "is a license to one Pierre Lemoine, guide and trap-

per, to hunt and fish in certain localities in the province of Quebec!"

"And the deed isn't here?" demanded Anstice.

"Apparently not!" replied Mr. Thornley, watching the boys examine the little trunk as though they suspected it of possessing a false bottom or secret compartment.

"I wonder why Mr. Lemon put those things up here," commented Hope.

"I think that is quite plain," Mr. Thornley answered thoughtfully. "After his wife left him, he took the things that reminded him of her and stored them in this cave. Perhaps he was the only person who knew of its existence. He has probably forgotten the box, but some memory must remain, and so he spoke of the cave to Max, without knowing why he did so."

"What shall we do with this stuff?" June inquired.

"Let's put it all back," said Charlotte, kneeling before the trunk as she spoke. The pathos of those tiny garments touched a responsive chord in her heart. A sudden vision of that unhappy girl-mother came to her as with deft hands she re-folded the dresses and packed them away.

"That's certainly the best thing to do," said Mr. Thornley with an appreciative smile for the spray of asters Charlotte tucked away with the little white gown.

The boys took the lantern and searched in vain for

another box or package concealed in the cave. Much disappointed, they replaced the chest under the heap of branches.

"All the same I am sure that deed is *somewhere!*" Max declared as they started home again. "I must think up a way to get into Mr. Lemon's house and have a look!"

"Max, you'll do nothing of the sort!" remarked Mr. Thornley quietly but with a certain finality in his tone. "To make any further search, even about the outside of his house, is entirely unjustifiable. The poor old man has been sufficiently annoyed and worried as it is."

Max's color rose at this rebuke. June, who knew nothing of his cousin's previous interference with Mr. Lemon, looked surprised. He supposed Mr. Thornley to be entirely in the dark as to their investigations.

"Even if this deed exists,— which I very much doubt,— Mr. Lemon is in no condition mentally to assume the responsibility involved if it should be found. He seems to have enough to live upon and probably would be unhappier under changed circumstances than he is at present. Personally, I think his story is a figment of his imagination, something he has brooded over until it seems real to him. But since the matter has so interested you, Max," Mr. Thornley went on less seriously, "it is quite possible

that your father, when he hears the story, may be willing to have Mr. Ames ascertain if such a deed was ever recorded."

"There really isn't anything to be done, then?" Charlotte asked after a pause.

"Nothing very definite. It may be that Mr. Marshall, if he knew the story and your theories about Mr. Lemon, would be interested in his father's old guide. Very possibly he himself has been with him as a boy. To tell Mr. Marshall seems to me the only step that is at all advisable. He may know something of the place Mr. Lemon came from and the chances of finding old friends or even relatives for him. I think, Max, it would be a good plan for you to write the rest of the story to Mr. Ames; tell him of the cave and the little chest and the letter from Mr. Marshall to Pierre Lemoine. Then, if Mr. Ames thinks Mr. James Marshall likely to be interested, allow him to use his discretion in passing on the tale just as it stands. I should leave it entirely to Mr. Ames. In that way, your desire to help Mr. Lemon may be realized, and it seems to be the only permissible way."

"All right, St. George!" answered Max, evidently with an effort, for he was both mortified and disappointed. "Well, this ends the affair of Pierre Lemoine, otherwise Pete Lemon!"

"If Mr. Ames or Mr. Marshall ever does anything, you must be sure to tell us," said June.

"I'll give Mr. Ames your address. Then, if he wants to ask any questions about the cave or the things in the chest, he can hear more quickly than he could from me."

"It's been very interesting," said Charlotte thoughtfully. Hope and Anstice, their attention no longer held by Mr. Lemon's affairs, had gone ahead. "But the most interesting part of all is what we shall never know."

"You mean about Kitty and why she took the baby?" asked Mr. Thornley.

"Yes, and why Mr. Lemon put the things in the trunk and hid them in the cave. And the stone against the door and those little red shoes and what has become of the baby who wore them," Charlotte added simply.

"That's true," said Mr. Thornley, "but, Charlotte, some stories are best left untold. We can appreciate the pathos of this one as it stands, and perhaps it is just as well that we can't read the entire tragedy, for tragedy it must have been. I think, on the whole, we are fortunate that we must leave it just where it is."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE END OF THE SUMMER

THE last days of a vacation, however happy, hold always quite as much of sadness as of joy. So many good times have been shared that the words "Do you remember?" or "What fun we had that day!" come frequently to one's lips and bring with them a little, lingering feeling of regret.

The special parting now at hand seemed even harder when the ocean was again to roll between the cousins who had grown so fond of one another. Everybody's spirits drooped the last afternoon as they gathered on the cottage piazza, hesitating to suggest any diversion that might cause the least separation of their party.

"I wish we were all leaving at the same time," said Hope rather mournfully. "It will be terribly lonesome without Max, now we've had him so long."

"Who knows but Max may be with us another summer!" declared her mother cheerily.

Pleasant as was the suggestion, Max looked doubtful. Going to college meant leaving his father, and no vacation plan could be tempting enough to make

that inevitable parting come one moment earlier than was absolutely necessary.

"Auntie, you'd better come to us next year," he finally suggested. "I don't know what Dad is going to do, but it's sure to be interesting. I shouldn't wonder if he'd be writing, and if he is, we would just settle down quietly somewhere. There's a little Swiss village near the Matterhorn where we were one summer. I've always wanted to go back for it's a dandy place to climb mountains and June and Hope and I could have no end of fun tramping. As for Molly, she could find a new place to get lost every five minutes if she liked. Say you'll come, Auntie!"

"Wouldn't that be great!" exclaimed June.

"I think Max will have to consult his father before we agree to that plan," replied Mrs. Ralston, smiling at the young people clustered below her on the porch steps.

"Dad would be delighted," Max went on eagerly. "He'd invite you all in a minute if he thought you'd really come. Do say you will, Auntie!"

"I can't make any promises, Max, but it will do no harm for us to plan for another summer together somewhere. It is easier for you and your father to come to us, you see."

"Why couldn't Uncle Rod work here?" asked June. "We could fix him a study in the barn. It's never used and it wouldn't be half bad."

"He always has to have stacks of books," observed Max. "Still, they could be sent from Boston. We'll see! I'm obliged to have Dad next summer, whatever happens, but I want Aunt Helen, too! We'll strike a combination somehow. But it would be such fun to have you all in Switzerland. We'd have the jolliest time! And Uncle George could come for a while. Look at Mr. Tyler — what's he so togged out for?"

Mr. Tyler, appearing very uncomfortable in a high collar and his Sunday suit, had pulled his horse to a stand before the cottage.

"I'm going to Rockland on business," he explained, "and I'm afraid I won't get back to-morrow before you folks leave, so I stopped to say good-by to Max and Mr. Thornley."

June went to call Mr. Thornley and the others gathered around the carriage.

"Max, I hope we'll see you another summer," Mr. Tyler concluded with a final handshake. "There's nobody round here who's likely to forget the boy who went through the brier swamp. I'm mighty glad you balanced that exploit by trying to burn up Baldface!"

With this parting thrust, the jolly farmer drove away, leaving a laughing group behind him.

"Mr. Tyler will never forget that little performance!" grinned June. "He takes solid comfort in thinking of it."

"I'm willing!" declared Max. "And now I propose to have that bout at tennis with St. George. If I can only win a set from him, my summer will be complete."

Mr. Thornley smiled. He had already vanquished June, though not with absolute ease. Hope, too, had given him a good game, for she played nearly as well as her brother.

"I've an idea that this will be my Waterloo, but you shall have your chance, Max. I choose Hope for my umpire."

"Carlotta for me!" announced Max. "She and Nan are just coming."

"With two judges this contest should proceed formally and in good order, but I'm not sure that it's fair to have both umpires Americans! Consider the feelings of a poor lone Englishman!"

"Max himself is more than half English," teased June.

"I'm not!" his cousin began indignantly, but stopped with an expressive shrug of the shoulders. "I don't know what I am!" he went on rather helplessly. "I have so many friends in different countries. But of course I'm an American — I only happen to have lived somewhere else."

"And Max's English education hasn't changed his nationality — merely its external finish," said Mr. Thornley mischievously. "Hope, I'm very willing to

confide my fortunes to your umpiring. Shall we begin?"

The entire party adjourned to the edge of the tennis court to watch the game and to laugh over Mr. Thornley's elaborate preparations. With great ceremony he removed his coat, examined the soles of his canvas shoes, and coming up to Max, took his racquet to compare it carefully with his own.

"It's exactly the same!" said Max as he gravely measured the handles.

"War to the bitter end then!" replied Mr. Thornley as he returned the racquet and shook hands across the net.

The first chance to serve fell to Max who won the game.

"Apparently this whole crowd of spectators is against me," commented Mr. Thornley in amusement at the applause that greeted the victory.

"You'll get this one!" laughed Max, for he knew his opponent's smashing delivery, and promptly lost two balls.

"One-all!" he called as he again came to the service line, and so the game went on, hotly contested, till the score was three-all and Mr. Thornley had the advantage. Max, in rushing to return a ball, tripped over a loose shoe-lace, missed his stroke and only by wild contortions, saved himself from falling.

"That was because your shoe was undone, Max. Sorry! Here's another."

"No, you don't! I won't take it, St. George. If you send it, I won't hit it!"

Mr. Thornley smiled and tossed over the extra balls.

"Oh, I hope Max wins!" said Anstice, dancing up and down in excitement. "Do beat him, Max!"

"It is fortunate that I've chosen an umpire for myself," declared Mr. Thornley. "I trust Hope, at least, doesn't wish to see me ingloriously beaten."

Both were playing their vigorous best and the score mounted first on one side and then on the other. At last the reckoning was six-seven in favor of Mr. Thornley, and the game score was deuce.

"Max, you must get this ball!" shouted June. "Give him a daisy-cutter!"

The ball struck in the extreme corner of the court and Mr. Thornley, thinking it was going outside, made no attempt to return it. A chorus of inquiries went up from the spectators. "It was in! Wasn't it in? Wasn't it?"

Mr. Thornley looked at Hope. "Personally, I am not quite sure. Was it out or in, Hope?"

"It was out!" announced Hope, glad to decide in his behalf.

Charlotte, who had not seen, yielded the point, but Max won the game after all, and by continued strenu-

ous exertion, brought the score to nine-eight in his favor. Mr. Thornley was growing tired, for he was somewhat out of practice and the playing had been energetic. Max, however, was merely getting warmed up to the game, and presently, by swift serving and skilful volleying gained the advantage. The next instant, Mr. Thornley threw up his racquet amid the shouts of the onlookers.

"Oh, St. George!" gasped Max, hot and breathless, with hair on end. "You didn't give me that last ball, did you?"

"That was a square deal, Max. I played the game fairly and you earned your victory," replied Mr. Thornley cordially as he again came up to the net to grasp the outstretched hand of his successful late antagonist.

"If I only knew where Ronald was, I'd send him a cablegram!" shouted impetuous Max. "I wonder if I shall ever beat you again!"

"Many times in all probability. Good work, Max! I shouldn't wonder if you could beat Ronald this fall, and I want to see that contest. You've improved, and of course you are older and stronger than when we last played together in Rome."

Mr. Thornley went to his room to prepare for tea, for since he and Max were leaving the next day, Mrs. Ralston had planned to have it at the gray cottage. Max was delayed while dressing and the others had

been seated some moments before he appeared in the dining-room.

"Oh — h!" he said, looking around. "Oh, I don't like to think that this is the last evening! We've had so many good times here."

"Now, sonny," remarked June, "just put on your bib and move your chair up to the table."

Max grinned and gave his cousin a fraternal slap on the back of the head. It was merely a passing pleasantry and would have done no harm had June not chanced to be drinking chocolate. The cup flew from his hand and its contents deluged the immediate vicinity.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed, staring at the dripping table-cloth. "You kid, just see what you've done!"

Max was divided between a desire to laugh and consternation at the ruin he had wrought. Mr. Thornley adjusted his eyeglasses to survey the havoc and shook his head with mock solemnity.

"Max," he remarked with deliberation, "if such discipline is known in New England, I hope your aunt will send you from the table!"

The young people all laughed at his comical tone. Max rose, walked around to Mrs. Ralston's place and went down on his knees before her. His eyes were brimming with mischief, but his demeanor was meekness itself.

"Auntie, a nation of cannibals would consider my manners a disgrace to them! If you say so, I'll go straight to bed without my supper!"

"Indeed, you shall not!" protested his aunt, kissing him. "What is a little spilled chocolate? Not half so bad as broken bones or injured feelings! We will just take off this table-cloth. Each shall move the dishes nearest, and in two minutes everything will be fresh again."

Within the time specified, a clean cloth was substituted and the supper proceeded, made even merrier by Max's mishap. Mr. Thornley seemed determined that the evening should be gay, and it was not until the entire party, with the exception of Molly and her mother, had escorted Charlotte and Anstice home, that any note of regret crept into the fun.

"What shall we all be doing a month from now?" remarked June as they sauntered back.

"I know what I'll be doing," replied his cousin. "I'll be in Rome, feeling as blue as the Carpathian mountains for you and Hope and Auntie and Molly."

"Probably having a most hilarious time with Connie, Louis, and Ronald," commented Mr. Thornley dryly. The others laughed and Max sighed.

"St. George is death on sentiment and no mistake! I know exactly what I'll be doing. Ronald will be working out geometry problems so fast that the chalk will be red-hot, just sizzling! Louis will rattle off

Greek verbs at such a rate that I'll feel like the tail of a kite trying to keep up. St. George will have on his mortar board and gown and be eying me in a way that will strike me as painfully familiar, and presently he'll tell me to stay after class. Then I'll get a lecture I've heard before about its being better to commit murder than be lazy!"

"Max, I never told you that!" Mr. Thornley expostulated.

"I know you never said it in so many words," acknowledged Max, "but I deduced it very logically from remarks you have made. People who commit murder usually sin from impulse. Laziness is a moral defect of will. Impulsive sins are more pardonable than wilful ones. Therefore: it is less sinful to be wicked than to be lazy!"

"Max, if you'd expend a little more energy over your Greek verbs and less in deducing erroneous conclusions from false premises, you wouldn't be kept after class."

"I suppose so," Max admitted frankly, "but Greek is a perfect blight on my existence. As soon as Dad gets back to Rome, I am going to spend one hour and eleven minutes by the clock imploring him to say I needn't study it any more. He will probably stick out the hour, but I have hopes that the eleven extra minutes will finish him! I never have succeeded yet in coaxing him to let me drop it, but he'll be so glad

to see me that he won't wish to take the first bloom off my joy at his return. I think I'll meet him at the station with my face white with chalk dust and a Greek grammar bound about my pallid brow."

They had reached the gray cottage and Mr. Thornley stopped to knock the ashes from his pipe.

> "'Everybody dead who spoke it;
> Everybody dead who wrote it;
> Everybody dies who learns it.
> Happy death! they surely earn it!'"

he quoted solemnly.

"I know it!" Max interrupted. "I'm convinced that thousands of boys have died because they had to study Greek! But just wait till I get hold of my dad!"

Mr. Thornley smiled mischievously. "I very much doubt whether you will succeed in coaxing your dad to let you drop it. Do you remember that tragedy you were writing the last term you were in school, on Rome in the days of Nero?"

"Yes! And you took it away from me because I wouldn't do my geometry! You never gave it back either!" exclaimed Max rather resentfully.

"I assure you that I had no intention of keeping it permanently! I forgot to return it when school closed. What I started to tell you was that this spring, when your father after leaving you with the Lisles, came back to Rome, I found that unfinished

tragedy in my desk and showed it to him. He perused it with earnest attention. Then he made one remark. 'Christopher,' said he, 'when Maxfield returns to school this autumn, I want you to put him through the stiffest possible course of mathematics and Greek prose!'"

Max's confusion was covered by the amused laughter of his cousins. "I see my finish!" he finally said. "But I'll tell Dad just what I think of him for reading that before I had a chance to finish it."

"When you see it again, you may not think it worth finishing. Really, Max, between your literary aspirations, and the sketches Ronald was drawing for his crazy plantation scheme, and the aeroplane Louis was trying to invent, I had a hard time that winter! I'm thankful you're all two years older now!"

June and Mr. Thornley went into the house, but Hope stopped in the doorway, casting a troubled glance at her cousin, who had paused a few paces down the path to take a last look at the moonlit lake.

"Max," she demanded suddenly, "were you really trying to write a tragedy?"

"Oh, it didn't amount to much. The subject was too big for me to handle. You see what Dad thought of it. Why, Hope, what's the matter?"

"*Everything!*" exploded poor Hope. "I've always wanted to write books! But June doesn't care so much about trying. It's the one thing in the world

I want most to do and I made him be interested just because we always share things. All last winter we planned to make a play this summer, and then June put it off because he thought it wasn't anything you'd like! I cared so much that it hurt me dreadfully because he wouldn't. To think we might have done it after all! You'd have been interested, and it would have helped me so much to know how you managed yours and with both of us working on it, June would have enjoyed it too!"

Hope's lament ended in a kind of wail as she leaned tragically against the door.

"Oh, Hope!" Max exclaimed in genuine distress. "How I wish I'd known! Why, I can't remember the time when I haven't been scribbling! Connie and I are always trying to do a play or a story. Dad poked fun at that tragedy, but he's always interested in my things and sometimes he likes them. But I didn't want you and June to think me a complete freak, so I cut it all out this summer, except that sometimes I scribbled a little when you thought me writing letters. Well, this *is* worse than the mess I made of Mr. Lemon's affairs!"

Hope was struggling between tears and laughter, but Max's final despairing wave of his hands turned the scale. She choked down her sobs.

"You aren't the only one who's 'messed' things,"

she declared pluckily. "I guess we both need another chance, and perhaps we'll have it next vacation."

"We'll begin in a different style. It's taken us most of this to get shaken down together, but that's done, once and for all, isn't it, Hope?"

His cousin nodded. "Indeed, it is!" she agreed bravely.

"I don't wonder you thought I'd butted in between you and June," Max went on. "I understand now several things that I didn't before."

"Look here!" interrupted June from the hall. "What *is* Max tearing his hair about?"

"Merely deploring my wasted life!" retorted his cousin so quickly that Hope was overcome with hysterical mirth. "Hope, it's a shame!" he added in a hasty whisper. "But I'm sure in the summer that's coming to us, we'll be all the better friends because we've rubbed off our square corners during this one. And the three of us together will write a play that will make the Atlantic ocean turn blue with admiration!"

"Your wasted life?" June repeated lazily, appearing behind Hope in the doorway. "You've learned one thing this summer, and that's to pitch a decent ball. I never expect you'll acknowledge that baseball is a better game than cricket, but I'd be perfectly willing now to back you for the All America!"

"Thanks!" Max laughed. "You can't get a rise out of me with that compliment! But if I want to raise a first-class shindy when I get back to Rome, I'll only have to play ball in your style. All the fellows will land on me at once. It's different in different places, you see!"

"Yes, I see!" drawled June. "I reckon I've learned something, too. When you first unpacked your trunk and fished out for your summer reading all that stuff in German and Italian and even some assorted poetry, I did think a pretty serious frost had struck little June. It looked as though he had fallen upon evil days. But then you promptly began to illumine my path with the fitful light of preserved foxes and *poltergeists* and dictionary English! Even your scientific study of American girls —"

June got no further for Max promptly tackled him. Hope stood watching the figures as they wrestled on the moonlit lawn until her brother, still the stronger, succeeded in getting his cousin down. Then, not waiting to hear the terms of peace proclaimed, she went in. A fragrant breeze seemed to have blown across her summer, sweeping before it all that was unpleasant, leaving still some things to regret, but nothing now that hurt. She could even smile in sympathy as she listened to the frolic on the lawn, prolonged until the boys subsided at last into their cots under the apple tree.

The holiday feeling lasted next day during the drive to town, but as the sea began to shimmer in the distance, only the combined efforts of June and Mr. Thornley served to keep up the spirits of the party.

"Auntie," whispered Max as he sat next Mrs. Ralston in the drug-store where he had insisted on stopping for ices. "I've a lump in my throat bigger than a whale and if you don't smile, I'm afraid I shall blubber!"

Max's pun was entirely unintentional, but it made his aunt almost hysterical.

"Oh, I'll smile, dear Max!" she said at last, "but I do so want to keep you always! You won't forget me, will you?"

"*Forget?*" Max repeated. "Auntie, how *could* one forget?"

As the buckboard reached the pier, the steamer for Boston was just coming in and time for farewells was brief. Hope's eyes were full as her cousin kissed her.

"Hope," he said quickly in her ear, "after the boat starts, watch, for there will be a wireless message especially for you."

Max and Mr. Thornley disappeared in the crowd that was boarding the steamer, emerging presently on the upper deck to make their way to the rail. As the propeller churned the water and the boat began to move, Max drew a small object from his pocket.

He threw it to the watchers on the wharf, but miscalculated the speed of the moving steamer. Striking a post, it dropped into the water.

"Why is Max firing a lemon?" demanded June. "That's not complimentary! Did we neglect to teach him this summer what they mean?"

June's question remained at the moment unanswered, for the distance between the shore and the boat was rapidly increasing. Mr. Thornley was waving his cap, but Max, also with uncovered head, impulsively stretched both hands toward his aunt with a gesture so expressive of love and regret that she was forced to hide her face. When she could again see distinctly, her nephew was vigorously responding to the fluttering handkerchiefs of the girls.

Slowly the steamer dwindled into the distance and as the figures on deck grew indistinguishable, Anstice peered solemnly into the soapy water washing the piles.

"There's a perfectly good lemon wasted!" she announced. "Oh!" she added with a sudden accession of interest in her voice, "he's made a pig of it! Look at its legs and its curly tail! I do wish we could reach it! Why, it's my Ford picnic pig!"

"So it is!" June agreed. "I'd get it for you if I could, Nan. No doubt it was meant for you."

"It was meant for all of us!" Anstice shrieked in delight. "It's a wireless message for everybody!

The pig for me! A lemon — that's for Charlotte because of Mr. Lemon!"

"And Max meant June to catch it to show how he's learned to pitch!" Hope volunteered eagerly.

"But what is there for you and Mother?" June inquired, still staring at the bobbing lemon.

"I've received my message," Mrs. Ralston replied gently. "There is a narrow ribbon tied to the pig's tail. That probably has some significance."

"So it has!" grinned June triumphantly. "Blue! That's for Hope!"

Charlotte and Anstice joined in his exclamations of amusement over Max's ingenious farewell, but Hope, though she also looked with a smile after the now distant steamer, understood that her share of the "wireless" meant more than a clever play upon her name.

THE END

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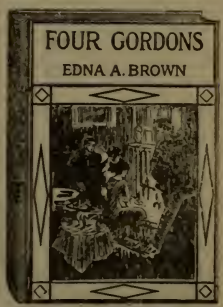

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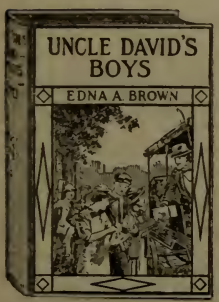

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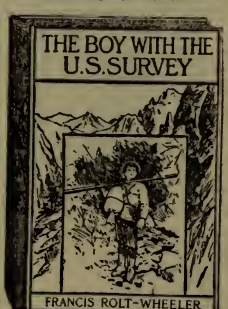

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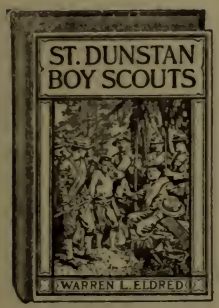

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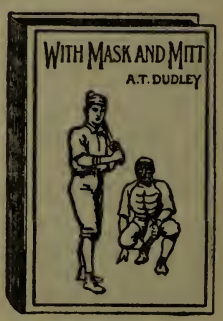

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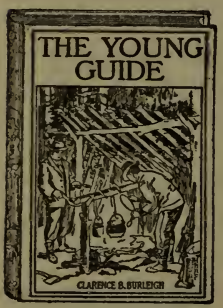
All Among the Loggers

NORMAN CARVER is a bright, vigorous youth, whose father feels that a winter of practical affairs will be better for his son than getting into scrapes at school, where, though clean and honest, his social position and active nature make other things easier than hard, old-fashioned study. So he is sent to the deep woods of Maine, where his father owns lumbering interests, and set to work as company's "clerk." An eventful winter follows which does much for him.

With Pickpole and Peavey

NORMAN CARVER, having had a winter as a clerk in a lumber camp, is given a somewhat similar position with a crew of river-drivers, and with him is his faithful friend, Fred Warner. The athletic, well-educated city boy and the earnest rural youth, "a born woodsman" as he is called, share in some very exciting adventures, and they bear themselves in a way that is a pleasure to read about.



The Young Guide

NORMAN accompanies his father on a vacation trip to the deep woods in the "open" season. In addition to the natural excitement of hunting, further adventures are supplied by a band of undesirable citizens who steal deer left hanging in the woods and sell them to "yarding crews." Norman Carver, and friend, Fred Warner, who wins laurels as a guide, are instrumental in having some of these villains brought to justice.

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